



THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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We Must Learn To Let Them Go

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Nearly forty years ago my father wrote a short article under this same title. In it he pointed out the dilemma preachers face when Christians who don't share our dedication to scriptural authority move into our area and seek to become part of our local fellowship.

Especially in areas where the church is numerically challenged, the temptation may be to merely preach the principles on Bible authority, but walk too softly in making the needed application to current issues. My father's point was that if newcomers prove to be resistant to teaching against church support of institutions, sponsoring church concepts and other unscriptural practices, "we must learn to let them go." To do otherwise will eventually lead to division—or worse yet—digression.

If we think that we have moved beyond that problem, we ought to "think again." With the accelerated pace of digression among many churches of Christ, we are beginning to see a remnant who are unwilling to accept the changes coming at the hands of the ultra-liberal among them. Some may try to find refuge with those of us who are more conservative.

This is good as long as they embrace a new dedication to the authority of the scriptures. However, as we "contend for the faith" (Jude 3) we must be prepared to preach *the word* "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). If those who want to maintain "a little liberalism" won't endure sound teaching, "we must learn to let them go."

Even if we were to have no such newcomers among us, the need is still there to teach and emphasize the need for scriptural authority. I fear there are many congregations, long identified as "non-institutional," filled with members who are unprepared to resist unscriptural innovation. Battles fought in past generations will not suffice in preventing digression among present and future generations.

Others We Can't Hang On To

While we're on the subject, there are others who will be offended by the truth of God's word. In a postmodern cultural setting, what the Bible defines as immorality is considered normal. Sexual relations outside of marriage has been renamed "living together," and we have been brainwashed into referring to homosexuals as "gays." With the stigma gone, most people of the world don't even try to hide their sexually immoral lifestyles. Our preaching and teaching on these subjects has become increasingly outside the mainstream.

I guess it was inevitable that we would begin to see so-called Christians, living in sin, trying to be accepted "as is" by faithful brethren. This, despite the fact that about fornication, we are told, "let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Gal. 5:3). In my own recent experience, we have had several cases in which newcomers attending our assemblies, while claiming to be members of the Lord's church, openly admitted to ongoing sexual immorality. There have been at least two cases wherein the couples have admitted that it was sinful, but were unwilling to repent, and really didn't think it was necessary to do so. You would think they had been taught the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. We must try to "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1), but if they will not heed God's word, "we must learn to let them go."

Still Others

One of the hardest things to do is to "let go" in cases where Christians "grow weary in doing good" (Gal. 6:9), and thereby "wander from the truth" (Jas. 5:19). We are quite aware that "he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:20), and so we must remind each one who has "forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Pet. 1:9) of his need to make his "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). Having done that, what more can we do?

Having been "once enlightened...and have tasted of the good word of God..." all we can do is remind them of what they already know (see Heb. 6:4-6). We can't renew them to repentance—they must do it themselves applying the same word that saved them in the first place.

Sometimes we don't know when to let go. With some, who have become perennial backsliders, we spend much time and energy pampering and cajoling them to come back again and again, sometimes to the detriment of the congregation. Many times those who chronically fall away have many other problems in their lives. Sometimes we go out of our way in providing economic assistance as an incentive to gain them back. I'm afraid that when we constantly remove the consequences of their actions, we become enablers in the very problems that take them away from the Lord. There comes a time when "we must learn to let them go."

What Would Jesus Do?

I realize that the foregoing may sound foreign to many. Even I had to ask myself if this is what Jesus would do. When I look at the life and ministry of Christ, I see one who, like His Father, is "full of compassion" (Psa. 86:15). Many of His miracles were prompted by His compassion for those in dire circumstances. Yet, when people rejected His teaching, He did not continue to pursue them. Consider His encounter with a young man who came running to Jesus, wanting to know what to do in order to inherit eternal life (Mk. 10:17-22). We are told that "Jesus, looking at him, loved him," but when Jesus told him what he needed to hear, the man went away and Jesus let him go. Even when many of His own disciples were offended at Him, and "walked with Him no more" (Jn. 6:66), we don't see Jesus running after them.

When brothers or sisters wander from the truth, love demands that we try to bring them back, but if they reject such efforts, we must face the fact that they have left the Lord, and "we must learn to let them go."

The Role of Emotions in Worship

By NATHAN COMBS

We live in a culture dominated by feelings. From the intellectual university classrooms to the average kitchen table, the existence of truth is increasingly called into question. Emotions and opinions have become the standard by which many live their lives. Sadly, this relativistic mindset has also gained a firm foothold in the minds of many who are religious. Congregations of charismatics take part in uncontrolled physical behavior because of an inward, emotional belief that they are being controlled by the Holy Spirit (though ironically, the only New Testament examples of frenetic behavior occur in demon-possessed cases: Matt. 17:14-15, Mk. 5:2-5, etc.).

In a zealous effort to counter misconceptions about worship, some Christians are quick to declare that worship has nothing to do with how we feel, that our adoration of our Creator strictly stems from our knowledge of His word.

While it is certainly true that we use scripture, not feelings, to determine how we should worship God (or how we have a relationship with Him, for that matter), it would be a gross overstatement to argue that our natural emotions have no place in godly worship. But how is a balance to be struck between these two extremes? As we will consider in this article, the way we address God in worship is certainly based on our knowledge of Him and His revealed will, yet the scriptures are also filled with indications that emotion plays an important role in our worship. Let's briefly examine prayer and singing, two ways in which we directly address God, and see how our emotions should connect to our worship.

Prayer

The book of Psalms includes some of the most passionate prayers recorded in scripture. Many of them contain the outpourings

of godly men embroiled in difficult circumstances or overwhelmed by thankfulness. In Psalm 3, for example, David prays to God out of great distress when he fled from his son, Absalom. David begins by voicing deep concern about his situation, then ends by affirming God's ability to save him. It is clear that these prayers were offered by an emotional man, yet his emotion proceeded from a knowledgeable mind. David could not have displayed such confidence in God if he hadn't *known* what God was capable of doing. David's relationship with God certainly wasn't *created* by his emotions, but his personal knowledge of God gave him a way to express his natural feelings and caused him to seek an even deeper connection to Him through prayer.

To use marriage as an example, the emotion that I show to my wife stems from my knowledge and deep appreciation of who she is. The more I find out about my wife, the more I desire to show her affection. But both emotion *and* knowledge must be present in our relationship in order to make it a good one. Our marriage would undeniably be in jeopardy if we showed little or no emotion to each other; conversely, if our connection to each other was primarily founded on our emotions, it would be a pretty flimsy relationship indeed!

Prayer in the New Testament is also recognized as an emotional, yet respectful experience based on knowledge. Peter admonished his recipients to "humble" themselves "under the mighty hand of God" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). A textual way to do that is by "casting all your anxieties on Him." We see from this scripture that it is perfectly valid for prayer to be offered to God from an emotionally-burdened heart (indeed, God *wants* us to do that), but it is also equally valid to note that prayer is to be given with an attitude of humility, recognizing who God is and what He is capable of doing. Such knowledge then compels us to give him our troubles and concerns.

Singing

In James 5:17, the writer simply states that "if any man is cheerful, let him sing praise." In context, James is describing several natural human conditions that should produce spiritual reactions. Suffering, and the emotions felt as a result of it, should produce prayer. Sickness should produce a desire to be healed with the help of brethren. Likewise, feelings of cheerfulness should cause us to praise God. James didn't bother to explain the need for singing to be based upon a proper knowledge of God's will, perhaps



because he's writing to a Christian audience who would have already understood the principle that they needed to worship correctly. At least some degree of knowledge is implied in the text; if we're supposed to praise God out of a cheerful heart, then that necessarily implies both the recognition of our situation and some understanding of the Being who has allowed us to prosper.

In Colossians 3:16-17 and its parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19-20, two things are apparent. First, thankfulness is an ingredient of musical worship. Thankfulness does not merely involve intellectual acknowledgement of blessings or circumstances; it is also the heartfelt emotion that springs from that understanding. Secondly, knowledge of God is mentioned in connection with our thankfulness. We are enabled to teach each other in song *because* the word of Christ dwells in us. Both scriptures mention that we're to do this "in the name of Jesus," or with His authority, which we cannot know except by His word. Therefore, singing is a combination of our knowledge and emotions working together to produce encouragement, admonishment, and edification.

I Close My Eyes, a hymn composed by Jay Conner, provides a concrete example for what we're discussing. The song's chorus says "I close my eyes; I see His majesty; I close my eyes, and feel His love for me." This is obviously an emotional section. Is it wrong to sing about "feeling" God's love for us? Carefully examine the rest of the song. The verses reveal that these emotions are described as a natural reaction of a fervent desire to seek God. "Teach me to do Thy will," "Make me to know Thy way; wherein my path should be" are taken straight from Psalm 143. When examined as a whole, the song is an excellent example of how we feel emotionally drawn to God *because* of our scripturally-grounded relationship with Him. The person who sings this song, then, not only has a way to express sincere, heart-felt emotion, but to proclaim to all that their relationship to God is firmly anchored in their (ever-growing) knowledge of how to please Him.

So let us not divorce our worship from our natural emotional response in our desire to be doctrinally sound! Paying homage to our Lord was never intended to be practiced as a mechanical exercise, no more than it is to be an uncontrolled gushing session. Let's take careful note of the ways that the Bible discusses worship and give Jehovah praise with our minds *and* our hearts.

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A POSITION OF HONOR

By RICK LIGGIN

Luke records an occasion when Jesus was invited to eat a meal in the home of a leading Pharisee (Lk. 14:1ff). While at this feast, Jesus noticed that the invited guests were picking out the places of honor and distinction at the table; they were concerned about getting a position that would make them look good.

Because of what He saw, the Lord told this parable: "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts

himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (17:8-11).

It seems to me that this parable teaches us something about honorable men and positions of honor. Because the place of honor is for an honorable man, the man who seeks to sit in that place purely for the sake of honor proves by his seeking that he *is not* an honorable man. This kind of man ultimately will be brought low by the Lord. The point is: a truly honorable man is never a position-seeker; he is never the kind of man who looks for the place of honor purely for honor's sake.

Now consider this application: the work of an elder is just that...*work* (1 Tim. 3:1). It is not a "position" or "office" that is held *over* members of a local church, but rather it is a work of service that is to be performed "among" the members (1 Thess. 5:12). Now it is true that the work of elders is a "good work" and that only men of proven character may be appointed to this work (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). And it is likewise true that

those who work hard in functioning as elders are "worthy of double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17). But these facts do not imply that the function of a bishop is to be viewed by us simply as a position of honor held by certain men. One who seeks the "position" of an elder because it is a place of honor is attempting to exalt himself. Such a person is setting himself up only to be humbled by the Lord.

As a Christian and as a preacher of the gospel of Christ, I am vitally concerned about helping men to develop themselves so that they can be scripturally appointed as bishops or shepherds in the local church. The church of the Lord is in desperate need of good leadership, and in my judgment, one of the greatest challenges for the future is developing men of quality character who can serve as elders. Local congregations everywhere need to be looking to the future to see how they can meet this challenge. Who will shepherd the local church that you are a part of in the next generation?

If for one certainly want to encourage men to develop the *desire* to serve the church in this good work. But if your desire to be an elder is not because you desire a good *work*, then maybe you need to quit thinking about becoming an elder. The Lord's church does not need elders who only sit in a place of honor. It needs men who will work hard at serving the local church by supplying the needs of the flock and equipping saints for the work of service. If you have enough vision for the future to work at developing yourself into that kind of a man, then God will exalt you in due time.

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PETER GOT IT RIGHT!

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

When Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matt. 16:18), He illustrated that man's religious conclusions and definitions may not be the same as God's. Some people thought things about Jesus that simply weren't true. Their belief, however sincere it may have been, didn't make Him John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets (Matt. 16:13-14).

Peter was correct when he answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). The others, however sincere, misguided, or deceived, were wrong. Saying, "My Jesus is..." or "The Jesus I accept allows..." was the thinking of people who reached wrong conclusions about Jesus. Peter's understanding of the truth came from God, not from men (Matt. 16:17). Our thinking must perceive what God means and then conform to it.

Peter was able to sort through the quagmire of incorrect religious positions and controversy and find the truth. Saying, "If the experts can't agree..." or "Maybe we need to go with the polls," would have been disastrous. It is possible to confidently know the truth, even in a confused religious world.

Peter's statement of truth gave the solution to division. The difference in what people believed about Jesus was more of a problem because it differed with God rather

than with each other. Division over who Jesus was could only be resolved by all accepting who He really was, not by everyone agreeing to a palatable compromise (i.e., He was Elijah). Generally, unity will naturally occur when all accept and apply the truth. Any other unity is more adhesion than oneness and does not produce unity with God.

Men's Weekend Bible Study to Discuss 'Overcoming the Odds'

The sixth annual *Men's Weekend Bible Study* will be held Friday night through Saturday afternoon September 11-12, 2009 at a campground near Manteno, Illinois. This event affords Christians from many different locations an opportunity to make or rekindle friendships while they study together. Following are the topics and speakers:

"*Recognizing the Need to Lead*" ~ Al Diestelkamp

"*What is a Leader?*" ~ Keith Barclay

"*Life's Plan—Do We Have One?*" ~ Rusty Taylor ~ Jeff Nettles ~ Joe Novak
(singles) (young parents) (empty nesters)

"*Yada, Yada, Yada!*" ~ Philip Chumbley

"*Recognizing the Need to Be Led*" ~ Bryan Bickford

"*Overcoming the Odds*" ~ Craig Dehut

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.menswbs.com, or e-mail Tim Zydek at <timzzz61@core.com>

The Search for Solutions To Our Nation's Woes

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

We live in a complicated world. Things are not always what they seem to be. Solutions are not as easy as some would have us think they are. Those in positions of power and influence want us to believe that they have the answers.

We are in the midst of an economic crisis. Have you really understood the explanations of the problems? Have you understood the proposed solutions? If so, I welcome you to email me and explain them to me in layman's terms because everything I am hearing is way above my pay grade.

For years we have been sending soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan allegedly as a part of a war on terrorism. It is a war that has become extremely unpopular. Foreign policy is complicated. Different cultures, different religions, different values, and different goals result in issues that most ordinary folks do not comprehend. Do you really understand what is going on? If so, please, explain it to me.

In the last national election both presidential candidates told us that they were candidates of change and that they had plans for fixing what is wrong with our nation. The implication was that they have a grasp on complicated issues such as the economy and

foreign policy and that we could trust them to lead America into its finest years.

However, what is wrong with America is what is wrong with humanity at large, and it will not be fixed with men, money, or missiles. "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain..." (Jas. 4:1,2). Selfishness and greed are core problems that can only be effectively addressed in a moral context which accepts that there are fundamental and absolute standards of right and wrong. When we reject these basic standards, we reject what makes us human beings created in the image of God. When we reject that spiritual pedigree, then we are left as animals to bite and devour one another as we seek to be leaders of the pack.

It is the spiritual and moral degradation of "we the people" that has harmed this nation more than anything else. Nothing better illustrates this than the sanction and practice of abortion. I am not saying that abortion is the only thing that is wrong with this nation; neither am I saying that if we stopped killing the unborn, all of our problems would be solved. I am saying that the selfish attitudes which permit the virtually unrestricted liberty of terminating unwanted human life is typical of what ails our nation.

For all of our alleged progress and intelligence, we certainly play dumb when it suits our purposes. We keep ourselves ignorant so that we can pretend to protect ourselves from any culpability, liability, or just plain ability to be of any help in getting to the root of a problem. This intellectual filibustering masquerades as humility when, in fact, it is self-serving.

In 1973, Justice Blackmun (writing for the majority in *Roe v. Wade*) said, "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer." The irony is that the court then acted on its alleged ignorance and determined that the unborn are not human lives worthy of protection under the law.

From a scientific and biological perspective, there is absolutely no question about when humans come into being; it is at conception. A two year old could look at an embryo at seven-weeks gestation and know he was looking at a fellow human being. Yet that unborn child has no legal protection under the laws of our nation. Therefore, when any politician says that answering the question of when life begins is beyond his ability, we have to question his ability to handle more complicated issues (i.e., economy, foreign policy) and/or his honesty.

Salvation from our national ills will not come from any man, woman, or political party. Indeed, if there is to be any salvation it can only come from one source, the grace of God. Do not build your house on the ever-shifting sands of politics or economics but on the solid rock of the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 7:24,25) and His apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). Any politician, economist, or scientist who does not build his house there will inevitably propose policies and theories which have relatively little value in solving the largest of human problems.

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Thanks to all who have chosen to partner with us in this labor of love. New postal rates made the past issue cost more than we projected, and due to the renewal of our mailing permit, this issue is expected to cost about \$690, which would leave us with a deficit of \$509.



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