

CHANGES
AHEAD
KEEP RIGHT →

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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CHANGE AGENTS

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

With every political election season come the debates between conservatives and liberals. Liberals attempt to sell their positions as progressive while describing their opponents' policies as archaic and inadequate to address present needs. Conservatives tend to appeal to foundational principles and proven methods while disparaging their opponents' ideas as harmful and dangerous. Most people quickly tire of all the inane rhetoric. Many are so disillusioned or apathetic that they don't participate in the political process at all—not even to cast a vote.

Of course, conservative and liberal attitudes are found in people's approaches to religion and Scripture as well. As with politics, many people have become so disillusioned by all the denominations and bad attitudes that they have stopped participating. This is the path of least resistance, so we should not be surprised that many choose this course.

Those who view themselves as progressive in their approach to Scripture will be quick to blame so-called conservatives and their intolerance of fresh ideas for being the cause of all of this discouragement. Meanwhile conservatives will blame the "change agents" that are infiltrating the churches for causing divisions and breeding discontentment.

The insufficiency and inaccuracy of most of these labels (liberal, conservative, progressive, anti or forbidding) should be evident by the simple fact that, depending on the issue being discussed, we would all find ourselves being labeled as each of these things at one time or another. These labels *might* be helpful shorthand when discussing a specific issue, but as a general label they are essentially worthless, misleading, or, worst of all, slanderous.

Take for example the term "change

agents." Change is often viewed by those who fancy themselves as conservatives as being the goal of liberals. Yet change is a neutral word. It does not inherently mean digression any more than it means progression. Whether change is good or bad depends upon context and perspective.

This is so easily illustrated in current politics. Every two to four years we Americans *change* our government through elections. Sometimes that change is for the better, sometimes it is for the worse, depending on your political perspective.

As Christians, let's be careful about labeling those we think are simply wrong about something as "change agents," because change is not necessarily bad. Indeed, change is necessary more often than it is not since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

From the perspective of the Jewish leaders of His day, Jesus was certainly a "change agent" as He threatened the status quo (cf. Jn. 11:47,48). Indeed, as His disciples it is our calling to be agents of change since our Lord has commissioned the making of disciples (a change from not being disciples) by calling on all to repent (change) (Lk.

24:47; Ac. 2:38). When this was faithfully carried out, it produced significant change in turning the world upside down (Ac. 17:6).

To pejoratively label as change agents those who are teaching or practicing differently than we teach or practice sounds arrogant, as if our way is the standard and that the way we have always done things is right and we are in no need of change. Hopefully, we have not come to see ourselves or our history as our own standard. If so, we are very much in need of some Christ-like change agents among us.

When we simply use clichéd jargon to demonize those we believe to be a negative influence, we actually hurt our cause for doing what is right and making an effective change for the better. Certainly, we *must* oppose those who adulterate the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, but we cannot do so by simplistically labeling them as "change agents" without condemning the very thing we are trying to be—agents of change "in a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

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Planned Preaching Trip to Sierra Leone

The Lord willing, Andy Diestelkamp will join Paul Earnhart, Sid Latham and Josiah Peeler as they travel to the West African nation of Sierra Leone in order to preach the gospel. They plan to leave November 27, returning December 20. Churches or individuals able and willing to help in the travel expenses may contact Andy by phone: (815) 844-5100 or email: adiestel@frontier.com

LEADERS MUST BE APPROACHABLE

By RICK LIGGIN

The New Testament teaches that those who serve as elders in local churches must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), and this ability involves much more than just directing a class discussion of some Bible topic. Elders must be so able to teach that they can hold fast the faithful word, exhort in sound doctrine, and even refute those who contradict (Tit. 1:9); they are men who can “feed the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2) and equip saints for the work of service (Eph. 4:11-12). These terms suggest that shepherds are not only seasoned Bible students, but also seasoned Bible teachers. Fundamentally, that’s what elders are: teachers...men who use the Word of God to lead, guide, and direct the souls that are under their charge (1 Pet. 5:2-4); and I would suggest that the Lord’s church would be much better off if elders concentrated more on their teaching work and less on business management.

Of course, it should be evident that “teaching” and “exhorting” are both forms of communication—very specialized and highly skilled forms of communication. One will never be able to teach and exhort if he does not first learn to communicate. Consequently, good communication skills are essential to good leadership, and that is especially so for those who shepherd local churches.

But please remember that communication is not just about speaking (and here is where I begin to get to the real focus of this article). Effective communication is always a two-way street: it requires both *sending* information and *receiving* information. To be a really effective communicator, one must do more than just learn how to speak. He must also learn how to *listen*. In fact, as

Stephen Covey puts it, an effective leader will seek first to understand, and then to be understood. This is a Biblical principle (cf. Jas. 1:19; Prov. 18:13).

In order to effectively communicate as a leader, those led must have a sense about me that I am willing to listen, and listen with a view to really understanding what they are saying. They must feel that they can come to me with their problems and get a fair hearing; that I am willing to be a kind of “confidant” to them...someone they can turn to and rely on when they need help and understanding. Being a “confidant” is one of the many great skills of our God. Better than anyone else, He know how to listen, and He cares about our troubles; which is why He urges us to cast our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7; 1 Jn. 1:9). God is a great leader!

Parents are supposed to be the ones children go to for advice and help in times of trouble. Elders are the ones church members should call on when they are spiritually weak (Jas. 5:14-15). In fact, all of us are supposed to be people to whom others can confess their faults (Jas.5:16). This requires us to be approachable people—especially if we are going to be leaders!

James tells us that being “reasonable” (NASB) is something that characterizes the “wisdom from above” (Jas. 3:17). This term can also be translated “willing to yield” (NKJV) or “easy to be entreated” (ASV; KJV). It carries the idea of being “persuadable”. There are some people about whom others feel it would be futile to go to them with a problem: “I could never go to that guy about this! He would never understand and he would never see my side! He would only be unreasonable!” But one whose wisdom comes from above will not be so unreasonable. A truly wise man will be seen by others as one that they can go to and talk to and get a fair hearing.

Are you an approachable person? Do your children feel that they can comfortably approach you with their problems, questions, or even disagreements? Do the members of the church that you oversee feel that they are able to speak with you as one of their elders? Is the eldership that you are a part of one that can be approach by those in the congregation? Do people, in general, see you as the kind of person they can come to with their difficulties, questions, or criticisms?

I know it’s hard to be objective in things like this. Most of us feel that we are approachable and easily entreated, but do others feel that way? “Sure, my kids know that they can come to me?” Do they really?

“Sure, the members know that they can talk to the elders?” Do they really? “Sure they do! We tell them that all the time! And if they don’t, that’s not our fault! You can’t force folks to come to you with their problems or disagreements.” But is it really *their* fault? It could be. Some, no matter who you are or what you try to be, just don’t have the courage, confidence, or will to go to their parents or elders. But as a leader, you must make sure that the problem is not *you*. Most folks will go to one who is reasonable, persuadable, and easily entreated. As a leader, you simply must build these qualities into your character and exemplify them openly for all to see—so that they will *know* you are the kind of person they can comfortably go to for a reasonable hearing.

There are at least two other things people must *know* about you, if they are going to feel comfortable approaching you...if you really are an easily entreated person. And please recognize that the lack of these things may point to the fact that you are not nearly as approachable as you think you are:

1) You must be able to listen to others with a view to really understanding them! People must know that you have a reputation for being one who will listen carefully *and understand* before responding. If you are one who often speaks before you think or before you hear, people will not want to approach you.

2) You must be able to speak to others without getting upset or getting your feelings hurt or somehow feel threatened. Some leaders seem to wear their feelings on their sleeves, and so others are afraid to talk to them (especially about disagreements) for fear that they will get angry or get their feelings hurt. If you are one who finds yourself bristling, getting hurt, or putting when others disagree with you or question your judgment, then don’t be surprised when folks don’t want to approach you.

So, how approachable are you...really? If you truly want to be an effective communicator and an effective leader, whether in the home or at work or in the church, you need to develop this approachable quality; you need to be reasonable and persuadable. And that’s going to require you to make a deliberate decision to work at building approachability into your character.

Will you make that kind of decision and work at being approachable? Your family and the church you are helping to lead needs you to be that kind of leader. Will you do it? I hope you will.

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Abstinence Is Reasonable

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication”

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3 - KJV

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Society is totally confused. It wants people to be reasonable (thinking, logically) about sex. It wants them to think about civil law, time and place (decency), disease, pregnancy, “protection,” etc. It wants boundaries, thought and self-control in these areas, but when it comes to abstinence it is thought “unreasonable” to expect people to maintain boundaries, thought and self-control.

People think abstinence is unreasonable because they don’t understand sanctification. Couples give in to sexual temptation because they forget their sanctification. The world thinks it strange and speaks evil of those who “do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation” because they do not accept sanctification (1 Pet. 4:4). Abstinence happens for Christians because they are sanctified, not because they have commandments that shame or intimidate them, or because they have no sex drive. Sanctification changes who we are and through that, what we do.

Singles

God made our bodies. He knows what is best for us. He knows what we are designed for: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body...” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). That’s right, God made us—sex organs, hormones, desires, and all—to glorify Him.

The world takes a “foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods” (1 Cor. 6:13) approach (“sex for the body and the body for sex”). Paul answers: “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For ‘*the two, He says, shall become one flesh.*’ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*” (1 Cor. 6:13b-18).

We “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18 - KJV) because in response to the cross we are giving ourselves to God in all things. We see ourselves as “joined to the Lord.” Therefore, abstinence is not simply about waiting until marriage, it is about serving the Lord with our bodies right now! Sexual abstinence works because our inner person wants to

VINES EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS

SANCTIFICATION

“holiness, separation to God, conduct befitting those so separated”

ABSTAIN, ABSTINENCE

“to hold oneself from”

FORNICATION

“illicit sexual intercourse.”

please the Lord more than it (or our body) wants to please self or another.

Sanctification is reasonable. It helps us arm ourselves to make good decisions. It puts our self-worth and self-esteem in God’s great love, not in someone else’s fickle love. It connects us with God who wants us for eternity, not just for momentary passing pleasure. It even helps us develop refusal skills as we learn in Christ to “...make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

Sanctification answers the question, “What do we do with ourselves?” We serve the Lord! Now the answer to the question, “Why did God give us sexual desires and sex?” Marriage!

Married

Sanctification doesn’t mean abstinence, it means spiritual purity through submitting to a relationship with God through Christ. Sexual intercourse is only right between a husband and wife in a marriage formed in keeping with God’s law. “Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). Sex in marriage isn’t dirty or sinful because it is in keeping with our submission to the will of God. From the beginning this has been right and reasonable: “For *this reason* a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5; Gen. 2:24).

God designed marriage to be the primary fulfillment of sexual desire and solution to sexual temptation: “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2). This requires that the needs, wants, and desires of one’s spouse be willingly met as though they were their own: “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.” (1 Cor. 7:3-4). Depriving one

another is only to happen by consent, and then only for a time, “...and come back together again so that Satan does not tempt you...” (1 Cor. 7:5). Abstinence can increase desire to the point of strong temptation. Sexual selfishness, blackmail, revenge, etc., is dangerous and a violation of our commitments to God and our spouses.

Our world is a very sensual and immoral place. Christians don’t avoid sexual sin by denying this. They marry. It is “better to marry than to burn *with passion*” (1 Cor. 7:9b). Husbands and wives don’t cope with the cultural inundation of sexual temptation by somehow imagining that Christians don’t feel sexual urges or think sexual thoughts—they fulfill the desires of their spouses. Just as husbands and wives want to be the “best” at things for their spouses, Christians try to be the best lovers to their spouses and want them to be the most sexually fulfilled that anyone can be. Sanctification in Christ makes us better spouses, for God and for our spouses.

Abstinence?

Although under normal circumstances a married person is not abstaining from sexual intercourse, faithfulness in marriage does imply abstinence from sex with others—abstinence from adultery. Adulterers are enemies of God (Jas. 4:4), do not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9), and receive God’s judgment (Heb. 13:4). Adulterers act contrary to and without regard to sanctification.

Marriage does not free one from all vestiges of self-control. Marriage can awaken desires which cannot always be immediately fulfilled. In the absence of one’s spouse, someone else is never an option. Even just lusting after another is a compromise of sexual desire which is committed only to one’s spouse (Matt. 5:28). Ultimately, sanctification, not romantic love, attraction, or even sexual satisfaction, is what keeps us from adultery. “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Joseph to Potiphar’s seducing wife - Gen. 39:9).

Sexual faithfulness is really about sanctification. It is about our purity, faithfulness and oneness with God. It is reasonable to choose the way that leads to eternal life. It is not reasonable to act like unthinking animals. It is reasonable that in Christ we act like the sanctified people (saints) He has made us.

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (Eph. 5:3)

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Distance ♦ Death ♦ Divorce ♦ Digression

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Just recently my wife and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, and the reflection leading up to that event reminded me of many friends, and the very pleasant fellowship we experienced with them. Most of our close friends were Christians with whom we struggled together in one or more of the six congregations of which we've been a part. I guess it should not be surprising that today we have little or nothing to do with most of these people. Some of the reasons are understandable, while others are disheartening.

Distance certainly plays a significant part in deterring close association with friends. We have moved—they have moved, sometimes hundreds of miles from one another. With our modern communication and transportation options this doesn't have to quell a close relationship, but it often does.

We enjoyed one friendship with a couple so closely that the hundreds of miles between us did not deter us from remaining close. Many miles were put on our vehicles simply so we could be together for a few days. We took vacations together, and even brainstormed about someday moving together to some place where we could establish a congregation where there was none. But an untimely death halved that friendship, at least until eternity.

Sadder, are the friendships that have been destroyed by divorce. One in particular comes to mind. We were very young, and they were slightly younger. We were members together in a congregation that was in the midst of controversy over issues that were dividing churches in the early 1960s,

and the wives were having babies "together." They eventually moved back to the south, but we remained fairly close for awhile, but distance did eventually have its effect. Then we heard from other friends of the divorce, and we never heard from either of them since. I hate divorce!

Then there are a few close friends we had with whom we seemingly enjoyed "one mind" concerning the faith, but over time they changed their mind and headed a different direction. They would likely complain about me accusing them of digression, but

it was they—not us—who wandered in a different direction than when we "walked together," and that's the very definition of digression. When "two walk together" because they are agreed (a principle stated in Amos 3:3), there is harmony, but it is disrupted when there is no agreement.

The disruptions to friendships by distance or death are only temporary. I have faith they will be resumed in Heaven one day. Whether the ones affected by divorce or digression will be renewed depends on the judgment of God, to which I submit.



By ROBERT E. SPEER

It is amazing what one "learns" on the internet. For instance, the following quote: "An Earth-size planet has been spotted orbiting a nearby star at a distance that would make it not too hot and not too cold—comfortable enough for life to exist, researchers announced today (September 29, 2010).

"If confirmed, the exoplanet, named Gliese 581g, would be the first Earth-like world found residing in a star's habitable zone—a region where a planet's temperature could sustain liquid water on its surface.

"Personally, given the ubiquity and propensity of life to flourish wherever it can, I would say, my own personal feeling is that the chances of life on this planet are 100 percent," said Steven Vogt, a professor of astronomy and astrophysics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, during a press briefing today. "I have almost no doubt about it."

Don't you just love science!?! Here we have an articulate and erudite professor from no less than the University of California, Santa Cruz,

saying there is a "100 percent chance of life" on Gliese 581g, adding. "I have almost no doubt about it." "Almost"—"almost no doubt"? Admittedly, I am not an astronomer nor an astrophysicist, but I have a question: How can something be 100 percent and leave room for even a little doubt?

Since I was a child—just this side of the invention of dirt—I have heard and read speculation of life on distant planets. Scientists have long been "sure" of life somewhere "out there," but all the prognostication and wishful thinking has not produced any life-as-we-know-it creatures; people, animals, or otherwise, anywhere—except on earth. In the biblical account of creation, one reads, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The remainder of the chapter reveals the unfolding of creation, specifically mentioning the day by literal day development of *earth*, culminating in the creation of Adam and Eve. The "chances" of this are 100 percent, and of this I have no doubt!

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