



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

April-May-June, 2012 • Volume 43, No. 2

Beginnings

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Beginnings are very important things. They establish patterns, traditions, habits, rituals, etc. The beginning of a new year may be the occasion of renewed efforts to break bad habits and/or establish good ones. The beginnings of lives, marriages, governments, businesses, and movements are often momentous occasions marked with ceremony, enthusiasm, high ideals, and noble goals. It is fitting that the beginnings of good things are noted, appreciated, and, when appropriate, imitated.

Scripture begins its inspired account of human history at the beginning of the natural world with the simple affirmation that God caused it all. He is credited with being the Creator of the universe. There are no complicated, philosophical arguments for God's existence. It is just declared to be so.

Throughout time men have attempted to explain how God did this, but it is not the purpose of Scripture to reveal God's mechanism other than to declare that it was by the power of His word. "Then God said...and it was so" (Gen. 1:6,7,9,11,14,15,24,26,30).

Though men of science continue to inquisitively seek answers to God's methods, many, defying common sense, posit atheistic explanations. These not only contradict Scripture, but much of what science has gleaned through centuries of observation, investigation, and experimentation. What we have learned is that something cannot come from nothing. Yet, the current, most widely accepted theories in academia, while acknowledging a beginning of the natural universe, suggest that everything we can observe ultimately came into being from nothing. Indeed, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psa. 14:1; 53:1).

Though God is invisible to the fleshly

eye, Paul succinctly declares that man is without excuse for his failure to deduce through its observation of nature not only the clear implication that God exists, but that He is powerful and eternal (Rom. 1:19,20).

History is littered with the foolishness of ignorant men who have worshiped as gods anything and everything in nature (including themselves and their ideas). Yet, from the beginning, the God of the universe is revealed to be a power that is outside of and superior to nature. He does not need us, we need Him (cf. Ac. 17:24-29). Therefore, He "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Ac. 17:30,31)

It is interesting to consider that when "God created the heavens and the earth" and it was in darkness that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters," (Gen. 1:1,2). As we are informed about the beginning of physical things, a distinction is promptly made between the natural and the spiritual. Nature is not God. To imagine nature as being God (or vice versa) is to inevitably fall into the idolatry of worshipping the created rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:22-25). We must not confuse the two.

On the sixth day of creation God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." (Gen. 1:26). Clearly, God made mankind distinctively different than the rest of His creation. However, what is curious is that God was not alone when He did this. In the beginning of God's physical creation there was more than one Person involved in the making of mankind in their image.

Certainly there is much that we are not

told about the motives for God creating this world and then distinctively creating mankind to have dominion over that world (Gen. 1:26,28). But let's be careful about assuming that God somehow needed our companionship. Whether or not these texts describing the beginning are early references to the three Persons who are called God or just references to the heavenly host, it is clear that God already had companionship.

However, the testimony of those who first believed that Jesus was the Son of God provides us with compelling evidence for who was at the beginning. John begins his gospel just like the creation account. While the Genesis account simply says, "God created the heavens and the earth," John elaborates. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:1-3).

Paul declared "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities, or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16). Jesus was certainly part of the "Us" in whose image mankind was created. Jesus' own explicit inclusion of the Holy Spirit with Himself and the Father in the making of His disciples through baptism (Matt. 28:19) confirms that the Three were One in the creation as in Their plan of salvation for those created in Their image.

The Creator dying for the created is too awesome to fully appreciate. That we were created in His image is amazing. That despite our sin He still welcomes us to be with Him is more so.

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: adiestel@frontier.com

CYCLICAL UNFAITHFULNESS AND HOW WE MIGHT AVOID IT

By KEITH BARCLAY

The period of the Judges is among Israel's most tragic times. Illustrated for us within the pages of this short history are the results of a people who have forgotten their God and the tragedy such a failed memory brings.

Idolatry and immorality become a norm and the people seem to be unable to fully extricate themselves from such iniquities and abominations. Punishment in the form of oppression by neighboring rulers would come, Israel (or the portion effected by the prevailing oppression) would cry for deliverance and God would send a judge (a deliverer) to return the people to periods of peace (2:11-23). The peace would last for eighty years (3:30), or a generation or two (5:31) or for shorter periods. At other times the length of time the judge functioned is mentioned without any word of peace, though it is usually assumed. This usually coincided with times when the judge seemed to function more administratively than militarily.

This bleak period demonstrates how quickly a people can go from triumph to tragedy. From moving to possess the land promised by their God to periods of bleak and debilitating oppression should have, at the very least, caused them pause—and it should cause us to examine ourselves so an unwanted history does not repeat itself.

As I reflect upon this text I am reminded that apostasy is only as far away as my failure to teach and lead properly. If I fail to remember my God and make Him my focus and share that reality with others, I personally—and the congregation I am working with—are in grave danger of behaving just like the disjointed, sometime feuding and

often oppressed Israelites of the Judges period.

When I survey the spiritual landscape around me I see the above description of Israel in the people of God today. Might that not suggest that leadership is waning, and what leadership there is has struggled to pass the principles of truth and righteousness to the next generation, just as was true of the poor leadership displayed during the period of the Judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6)?

This failure to “know” God transcended knowing facts about Him or the history between Himself and His people. It involved a relationship with Him from which an unrelenting loyalty and obedience should have flowed. Did this ever exist for them? I would suggest it did during those times of peace the book describes. Does it exist for us? That one you will have to answer for yourself.

The solution to this problem is more complex than putting together an ideal curriculum for our Bible class program. It involves more than a balanced presentation of positive and negative sermons. It involves more than having scriptural leadership in place. Each of these and a host of other things may all contribute to an environment where we can truly get to know God but these do not insure an intimacy with Him. That comes by choice...a choice guided by all the facts we can know about

Him, all the history we can assemble about Him and His dealings with His people. It is my choosing *not* to do what is right in my own eyes (17:6), but instead, willingly yielding to Him.

Early in Israel's history they failed to make this choice even though: 1] they knew the facts (cf. Jephthah's response to the king of Ammon); 2] they or the ancestors witnessed things we can only imagine (Red Sea, previous victories, fleeces, etc.); and 3] they were “living” the promise fulfilled, the reception of the land (though they probably had imagined it coming about in another way). In spite of all this they *chose* “to do what was right in their own eyes.”

Leadership must keep the vision of an intimacy with God ever before those they lead. They need to utilize every means at their disposal to accomplish this...to remind us of His love, mercy, justice and judgment...to draw us near and to secure an unwavering loyalty to Him who, in every way, has demonstrated His desire to know us and to be our God.

Let us not make the same mistakes as Israel of old. Let us lead valiantly and let us choose intimacy. That combination will enable us to enjoy peace, but more importantly, to enjoy God...not only in the present but for generations to come...and not only here but for all eternity!

2415 Grey Fox Trail, Bloomington, Illinois 61705
keith.barclay@comcast.com

Sober Minded

In Every Sense of the Term



By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Researchers at the University of California San Diego reviewed 14 years of accident data and found that “A blood alcohol concentration of just 0.01 percent was associated with risky behaviors such as speeding.” Lead researcher, David P. Phillips, Ph.D. says, “For a 180 pound person, that translates to one glass of wine or a bottle of beer.” (*Better Homes And Gardens*, November 2011, pg 184).

Even some people of the world are beginning to admit that for the person who doesn't want to make bad decisions that lead to “risky behaviors,” even one drink is too much. As Christians, we have been

taught by God's grace that, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...” (Tit. 1:11-12). We are committed to making decisions that are pleasing to God in all things and we therefore reject anything that clouds thinking or encourages risky behavior.

The world wants us to be wise drivers. After even one drink we are not fit to drive home. Impaired thinking will not get us to an eternal home of glory either. Be wise. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Pr 20:1).

940 N. Elmwood Dr., Aurora, Illinois 60506
e-mail: daviddiestel@yahoo.com

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Published quarterly in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice by the Diestelkamp family. Distributed free in quantities and as ability permits.

Editor AL DIESTELKAMP
P.O.Box 891
Cortland, IL 60112-0891
(815) 756-9840

E-mail aldiestel@gmail.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

The Church is the Saved

By RICK LIGGIN

The response to Peter's preaching on the first Pentecost after Jesus' ascension back to heaven is recorded for us in the book of Acts: "So then, those who had received His word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (2:41). We then read of these same people "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (2:42). We also read that these believers "were together" and that "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (2:44-47).

Though the word "church" is not actually a part of the original text in this passage (KJV; NKJV), the Lord's "church" is clearly under consideration here. If we carefully follow this "number" of saved people through the early chapters of Acts, it soon becomes evident that they form "the congregation of those who believe" (4:32), which is the "church" (5:11). And so, as we read about "the Lord...adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (2:47), we recognize that this is the beginning of the Lord's church. We might even say that this is where Jesus "established the church" He had promised to build (Matt. 16:18). But what do we mean when we say that the Lord "established" or "built" His "church" here on the day of Pentecost?

Did Jesus establish or build something, like a club or wagon (as Robert Turner used to say) and then invite people to "join" the club or "climb on" the wagon in order to be saved? That is not what we read about here in the book of Acts! What we read about are people "being saved" as each one individually responded obediently to the gospel message preached; and then those "saved" individuals were collected or added together (2:41-47) into a "congregation" of believers. The church was the results of people being saved by obeying the word of the Lord, which was preached by His apostles.

When we start thinking of the "church" as a thing established and people then joining "it," we are on the road to denominationalism. Why? Because we start to think of the church as something other than the people, and "it" (the church) stands between salvation and us; we start to think that we are saved because we are part of the church (we see our salvation as dependent on "it"). Maybe worst of all, we start to think that our salvation is secured because we are members in this "institution." This is simply the wrong way to think about the church that our Lord established.

The word "church" is a collective noun (like herd or flock). It is a word that collects people...more specifically saved people. The church is not a building or physical structure, and we need to stop using the word "church" this way or we will forever perpetuate wrong views of the Lord's church! Again: the word "church" is a collective noun that collects saved people together!

The church Jesus built is all the saved collected together in a group, like sheep collected in a flock or cattle in a herd. A shepherd does not establish a "flock," and then add sheep to "it"; nor does a rancher establish a "herd," and then add cows to "it." A flock (or herd) is built as sheep (or cattle) are collected together. And just as a flock does not exist without sheep, and just as a herd does not exist without cattle, so also the church does not exist apart from saved people. Without saved people collected together, there is no church. The church is not something that is built, and then people are added to it. In truth, Christ is building His church as individuals receive His Word, are baptized, and are saved. Building the church has been, and continues to be, a work in progress...a work that Jesus began on the day of Pentecost (Ac.2:41-47), and that He continues to do even to this day. Those who are in His church are those who are in a relationship with Him, because He has saved them (Eph. 5:23) and added them to His group (Ac. 2:47; 2 Tim. 2:19). Their allegiance is not to the group, but to Him...their Lord (Ac. 11:20-21,23). When one falls away and becomes unfaithful, it is not the church he is unfaithful to...one doesn't "quit the church!" It is the Lord one becomes unfaithful to...he "quits the Lord!" Again, thinking that our allegiance

is to the church is thinking in a denominational way.

The point is that one's salvation is not dependent on the church or on one's being in the church. To think this is to think backwards. Your being in Christ's church is dependent on your being a saved one and continuing to act as a saved one. Being in the Lord's church is the result of one's obedient response to the Lord's will revealed in His word, which brings salvation. And if one becomes lost by refusing to remain true to the Lord, he is no longer in the Lord's church. Must one be a member of the church to be saved? No, one must be saved to be a member of the church! But can one be saved outside the church? No, since to be outside the church is to be among the lost! The process that makes one saved automatically results in his being collected into the saved group (Christ's church).

Now please don't think that we are trying to suggest that the church is unimportant. We are simply trying to help us get a proper perspective on the church in relationship to Christ and our salvation. The church is not the means of our salvation! Christ is...and therefore, it is Christ who must be preached, and not the church! The church is the results of men being saved through their obedience to the Lord in His word. Your salvation is not dependent on the church or on your being a member of the church; your salvation is dependent on your obedience to the Lord's will. If you refuse to obey the Lord's will, you reject salvation. And if you refuse to continue in the Lord's will, whether you consider yourself to be a member of the church or not, you have no salvation.

315 E. Almond Drive, Washington, Illinois 61571
e-mail: rcliggin@gmail.com

The Moon Is Made of Green Cheese

By AL DIESTELKAMP

In the 16th and 17th century, there was a popular proverb that "the moon is made of green cheese." As late as 1902 a study showed that, when questioned about the moon's composition, green cheese was the most common answer. Today, the phrase is used to illustrate extreme gullibility.

For many years in his preaching, my father would say, "If you take scriptures out of their contexts, you can 'prove' anything." He would often add, "You could even prove the moon is made of green cheese." One day after hearing him

say that, my mother said, "Prove it!" Using his KJV Bible, here's the 3-point "proof" he came up with:

1] "Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?" (Job 10:10).

2] "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also" (Gen. 1:16).

3] "The range of the mountains *is* his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing" (Job 39:8).

"Ridiculous!," you say? Yes, but no more so than what some people do in trying to justify their false doctrines.



THE LAW OF OUR KING

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** (1911-1995)

James says, “if ye fulfill the royal law according to the scriptures. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, you do well” (Jas. 2:8). Some footnotes identify this “royal law” as “the law of our King.” It certainly does not mean that this is the only law of Christ for us today, but it surely does mean that those who have taken Jesus as their King will love their neighbors. In other words, if one does not love his fellowman, it is obvious that he is not in subjection to the law of Christ. The reader is urged to see further emphasis on this matter by reading 1 Jn. 2:10; 3:10, 14-23; 4:7-21.

But going back to our initial text, we see another specific emphasis by reading the following verse: “If ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors” (Jas. 2:9). In fact, the entire first part of this chapter is teaching the great principle of impartiality. Significantly, the law of our King teaches us that we must love people without preference that is based upon wealth versus poverty.

It is a hard saying! Outwardly we may submit and do our best to give attention to the poor, but what is the attitude of our hearts? Do we actually have the same respect for the man in old, worn clothing as we do for the one that is dressed in fine attire? When we greet people, is there a difference in the inner feeling we have to-

ward that one who drives a new Lincoln Continental and the one who drives an old, beat-up Ford Pinto? If circumstances make it necessary that we choose to greet only one of two people, will we choose the one in a fine fur coat, or the one in a plain cloth garment?

Heart Trouble

Perhaps it is necessary that we examine the attitude of our hearts even more than the outward expressions that are seen of men. After all, remember, as one “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). So if our hearts are filled with vanity, pride, selfishness, and if we lack humility, meekness and compassion, then, regardless of the outward demonstration we may make, God is not pleased.

If we snub a poor person, he probably won’t notice it much, for he is accustomed to such treatment. But the Lord will take note, for the love of God, his grace and mercy—and even His law—are completely without partiality, and one significant intent of His law is that it produce the same

impartial compassion in the heart of each child of God.

Now let us consider some applications: (1) Preachers: What is your heart’s desire? Is it to go where there is a beautiful, commodious building and preach to an affluent people? Would you consider a place that has no building, or that uses a mud hut or a bamboo shack? (2) Elders: Do you direct the energies of the church toward the affluent suburbia and the sophisticated “upper class”? Would you consider the down-and-out people of the tenement sections—those who have no cars, and even those who have no jobs?

Submission to the law of our King demands more than generous benevolence for the unfortunate. When we will have given much money (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) we will have done well, but when we will have given genuine love, expressed in gifts that money can’t buy—in care, concern, companionship, compassion—then we will have done better!

This article first appeared in THINK, Vol. 8, No. 4, dated July-August, 1977

A BELOVED FAMILY MEMBER PASSES



JAMES A. HODGES, 82, died April 10, 2012 following a battle with cancer. The husband of our sister, Wanda, Jim was by far the most educated in our family, holding three master’s degrees, as well as a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Though known as Dr. Hodges in some circles, he was known by our children and grandchildren as “uncle Jim,” and by fellow-Christians as “brother Hodges.”

He spent nearly his entire adult life serv-

ing young people at Florida College, first as a teacher of upper-division students, and later as a director of the FC library. In addition, he has spent many years writing a book defending creation and refuting evolution, which is yet to be published.

Jim is survived by his wife, Wanda, a son, Paul (Nancy), two daughters, Lois Matthews and Martha Prince (Gary), seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. A son, Timothy, and a daughter, Violet preceded him in death.

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:

Printing & supplies	\$ 85.00
Postage (U.S. & Canada)	408.10
Return Postage (21)	9.41
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 502.51
Funds available for past issue	370.14
Deficit	\$ 132.37

Donations: (as of 4/29)

Jerry & Sue Brewer, AL	\$ 50.00
Robert & Marjorie Springborg, IL	20.00
Anonymous, IN	25.00
Anonymous, IL	75.00
Anonymous, KY	100.00
Anonymous, FL	60.00
Joe & Monetta Novak, IL	25.00
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 355.00
Deficit from past issue	132.37
Funds for this issue	\$ 222.63

Once again, we thank our voluntary partners, whose donations make this paper possible. With the increase in foreign postage, this issue is expected to cost approximately \$545, which would create a deficit of about \$322.

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

P.O. Box 891 • Cortland, IL 60112-0891

Return Service Requested

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Cortland, IL
Permit No. 11