



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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LOCAL PREACHER TENURE

The Long and Short of the Matter

By AL DIESTELKAMP

I was recently encouraged to write about the “pros and cons” of a preacher working in one location over a long period of time. The fact that I am in my 25th year in the same community might make me qualified to share my thoughts about the subject. However, based on that criterion, I have two brothers and a son all of whom have been in their current works even longer than I, and if asked, any one of them might offer a different perspective on this topic.

In this regard my brothers and I have not imitated our father’s practice of relocating every three or four years. His preaching, especially in the decades of the 40s and 50s, was during a time of substantial growth among the Lord’s people. It was also a time when advocates of centralization and other unscriptural innovations were recruiting churches to their causes, and some of his moves were attempts to meet those challenges. However, even in his later years of preaching he tended not to “let any grass grow under his feet.”

As I thought about my “assignment” for this essay, I did a little research regarding preacher changes in churches nearby to me. I decided to look at the changes that have taken place in the 12 nearest congregations to me that have had preachers working among them. In the years I have “stayed put” these congregations have had no less than 52 preachers. One congregation has had eight preachers in that time period.

Before I get into the “pro and cons” of lengthy preacher tenures, let me make it clear that whether a preacher’s stay is short-term, or he becomes a “permanent fixture” is a matter to be determined by those involved. In fact, I believe there is a need for those who will stay put, and also for those who will move on to other challenges. It is not a matter of right and wrong.

As I made my list of advantages and disadvantages I noticed some double-edged

swords. For instance, a lengthy stay often improves the preacher’s ability to purchase a house, and hopefully accrue some equity, but on the other side, home ownership might hamper his ability to relocate when it would be wise or necessary.

Many preachers consider it an advantage to stay in one place longer so that their children are not uprooted from their schools. Personally, I can’t relate too well to that as an advantage since, as a child, I considered our frequent moves an adventure, even though I ended up attending five different elementary and two high schools. It is my opinion (for what it’s worth) that children are much more resilient than we give them credit for, and we sometimes place undue emphasis on secular education. If the children’s educational situation is the primary reason for a preacher to stay where he is, that may turn out to be a disadvantage to his work for the Lord.

Another advantage to staying in one location might be that it enables the preacher and his wife to develop close friendships. This can be a great blessing, but the preacher must be wary of the temptation to adjust one’s preaching to the liking of his friends. Let’s face it; even among the closest of friends there will be differences of convictions on controversial issues. The faithful preacher cannot allow his friendships to shape his preaching.

The advantages we have discussed so far may benefit the preacher and his family, but not necessarily the congregation. While enjoying these advantages, it should be noted that it would be selfish to base one’s decision to stay or go based solely on “what’s best for me.” So we now turn our attention to some possible “pros and cons” of long-term preacher tenure from the local congregation’s perspective.

The most obvious benefit of extended preacher tenure is the cost savings. Most moving costs of an incoming preacher are usually borne by the congregation.

Ideally, the longer one remains in a given location the greater his influence should be in that community and the local congregation. Of course, this should be true of every Christian—not just the preacher. However, because the preacher has a very visible role in the congregation, there is a danger of evolving into a “preacher rule” situation. This is especially true in congregations lacking elders. Even when the preacher tries not to exert undue influence, it is sometimes thrust upon him. If a congregation thinks too highly of the preacher they run the risk of relying on him “beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6).

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages for a preacher to stay in a congregation long-term is the possibility of him serving as an elder. Considering the preacher to serve as an elder often doubles the ability of a congregation to “set in order the things that are lacking” (Tit. 1:5).

Finally, we should consider a couple of disadvantages that may not have any corresponding advantages when a preacher stays long-term in one place:

The preacher may find it difficult to stay “fresh” in his presentation. The message must remain the same, and he may have trouble finding ways to convey that message in a way that keeps listeners’ attention.

Eventually the preacher is going to enter a time when “difficult days come,” and “the day when the keepers of the house tremble” (Eccl. 12:2-3). Along with advanced age may come diminished abilities that can test the patience of a congregation.

So, as one who has stayed in one place for many years, here is my suggestion to other preachers: Go somewhere you are needed; preach the word; when considering whether to relocate, make a selfless decision based on what is best for the cause of Christ, including the congregation you may be leaving. In doing that, whether your stay in a given location is short or long, it will be to the glory of God.

Attempts to Circumvent Jesus' Teaching

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

As I write this article I am sitting behind a table at the Livingston County/4-H Fair for my 26th year in a row. The commercial building has far less displays in it that it did years ago. The number of people who pass through this building is substantially diminished and those who stop at the table at which I am sitting are even fewer. I do not take this personally, I just recognize that most fair-goers have little interest in engaging in spiritual discussion with a relative stranger. Who knows where *that* conversation would lead?

In recent years we have borrowed a quiz box for which I made up four series (one for each day of the fair) of 18 true/false or multiple choice questions. These questions are not "trick" questions, but some (due to their ignorance) think of some of them that way. Some are relatively easy, others intentionally challenge prevalent misconceptions. Some of those misconceptions are minor, but some of them are major. With each question I list the Scripture reference that supports the correct answer. A Bible is always laying there so those references can be examined in their context.

One of my multiple choice questions is, "Jesus taught, whoever divorces and marries another commits: blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft." The reference cited is Mark 10:11,12. The teaching of Jesus on this subject is consistently met with incredulity and resistance. This resistance does not come only from the ignorant. Those very familiar with Jesus' teaching have become quite creative in their efforts to circumvent it.

A common ethical question and proposed exception to Jesus' teaching against divorce pertains to domestic abuse. It seems unfathomable to many that Jesus might expect a wife to remain in a marriage that was dangerous to her life. Of course, the word abuse can include everything from neglect,

to meanness, to mental cruelty, to physical violence. Indeed, all of these would certainly involve a spouse sinning against his or her mate. Does the failure of a spouse to be what he should be excuse his mate to create exceptions to Jesus' teaching about marriage?

Here are two other "true or false" statements that I use on the quiz box. "A husband must love, nourish, cherish and honor his wife." The references cited are Ephesians 5:25-29 and 1 Peter 3:7. Immediately following is the statement, "A wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord." The references cited are Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:1-6. Of course, if you are familiar with the texts referenced, then you know that both of the above statements are true. However, one year I overheard a woman comment to a companion that the latter statement was "only true if" the husband was being what he ought to be. This is a common misconception.

Indeed, the context of 1 Peter 3:1-6 makes it clear to anyone who can follow a train of thought that a woman is to be the kind of wife that she ought to be regardless of whether or not her husband is being what he ought to be, and "likewise" the husband must be what he ought to be toward his wife regardless of her behavior. Since Peter expected the first Christians to submit to the governing authorities (Rome) and harsh and unfair masters (2:13-20), there can be no misunderstanding what we are called to do in the context of marriage. "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.... For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (2:19,21).

Followers of Jesus' example do not modify His teaching on marriage (or any other subject) simply because it may require them to suffer unfair or harsh treatment... "even the death of the cross" (cf. Phil. 2:8).

Indeed, when men presumptuously modify Jesus' teaching in the name of justice and fairness so as to avoid the inconveniences, discomforts, and sacrifices that arise from following our Lord, then they miss their calling.

We do not expect the world to appreciate this teaching, but it ought to resonate as true with those of us who confess Jesus as Lord and recognize that "when He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree...by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:23,24).

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting that men who abuse their wives should go uncorrected or unpunished. Peter's instructions to servants to endure harsh treatment is not in any respect tolerating abusive masters. Indeed, masters will have to answer to their Master for how they treated their servants (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1). So, it must not be presumed that I am calling for women or society to tolerate abusive husbands. Indeed, it should not be tolerated, but confronted. I am saying that divorce is not the proper response. Nevertheless, in the name of compassion we have often lowered the standards of God's word to excuse ourselves from our calling.

God's word has much wise instruction and counsel that should be applied to the best and worst of marriages, but spouses, families, churches and communities are foolishly ignoring those principles in favor of divorce despite Jesus' clear prohibition. The Sermon on the Mount by itself is a treasure trove of guiding principles that many have never thought to apply to their marriages. Shame on us. We can do better. We must do better if we expect to enjoy citizenship in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

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

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

E-mail adiestel@gmail.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

Men's Overnight BIBLE STUDY

The ninth annual Men's Overnight Bible Study will be held Friday night through Saturday afternoon, September 14-15, 2012 at Illinois District Camp in Wapella, Illinois.

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- Friday PM: **A Look at "How We Amuse Ourselves"** ~ Bill Sink
Barriers to Communication ~ Rick Liggins
- Saturday AM: **Looking at "One Another"** ~ Brian Bickford
Learning to Listen ~ Gale Towles
Giving Gentle Answers ~ Byron Nash
Learning to Establish Trust ~ Dan Peters
- Saturday PM: **Panel Forum** ~ moderated by Andy Diestelkamp

Membership in the Local Church

By RICK LIGGIN

In an earlier article, we demonstrated that the church Jesus established (and His building) has no identity apart from *people*. When Jesus established the church, He did not establish *something*, and then invite people to join “it” (like a club or a society). Instead, salvation was offered through the word preached, and those who received and obeyed it were saved. The Lord then added to the church (collected together in a group) those who were being saved! The church is the results of salvation...not the means of salvation. So, when we think “church,” we must think, not of some *thing*, but of some *ones*...a group of saved people.

So far, we have been using the word “church” in its broadest universal sense... the way Jesus used it when He promised to build His “church” (Matt. 16:18). In this universal sense, the “church” is a collection of all saved people in all the world throughout all time since Christ first began building it. This universal church has no earthly organization, and it does not act collectively. It only acts distributively, as each member does what God requires of him. These saved people are collected together figuratively as the “church” (group or assembly) of Christ because all of them share in a common relationship with God that is maintained as each one individually obeys His will (1 Jn. 1:5-9).

But Jesus also used the word “church” in a *local* sense (Matt. 18:17), which illustrates that He intended for local churches to exist. We are not surprised, then, when we repeatedly read in the New Testament about the existence of local churches (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2:1; 2:12; 2:18; 3:1; etc.); and about the apostles grouping disciples together in local flocks with elders to oversee and shepherd them (Phil. 1:1; Ac. 11:19-26; 13:1; 14:21-23). In fact, the New Testament actually limits the oversight of elders to “*the flock of God among you*” (1 Pet. 5:2). This statement clearly implies, not only the existence of *known* local flocks (churches), but also that the Lord intends for every disciple to become a member of some local flock. If the oversight of elders is, indeed, limited to “*the flock of God among you*,” elders must be able to identify exactly who is and who is not in their flock.

We draw attention to this fact because some among us seem to be under the impression that local church membership is unnecessary: “We are members of the universal church, and that’s enough.” This view simply is not supported in Scripture.



We do not read in the New Testament about “floating members,” who were not a part of any local flock. In fact, the apostle Paul’s own personal example illustrates our point: when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion, he tried “to associate with” or “join himself to the disciples” there (Ac. 9:26-28). The Jerusalem brethren were initially skeptical; but when Barnabas spoke for Paul, he was accepted, and was then “with them” in their work until Jewish persecution made it impossible (9:27-30). The point is that this event illustrates the fact that first century disciples joined themselves to local congregations: they became members of local churches.

An equally wrong concept of some today is that one can “keep his membership” at one local church, while indefinitely attending services or “visiting” with another. Listen: you can’t be a member of a church if you don’t attend its gatherings or participate in its work! You will remember that Barnabas was a part of the church in Jerusalem when he was sent by that church to Antioch where the gospel had only recently been preached (cf. Ac. 11:19-26). Did Barnabas “keep his membership” in the Jerusalem church while he worked in Antioch for at least “an entire year”? Clearly, he did not, since after this we read that Barnabas was one of the teachers “at Antioch, *in the church that was there*” (13:1).

But how does one become a member of a local church? Doesn’t being added to the universal church also add one to the local church? The answer is, “No.” How one becomes a member of a local church differs from how one becomes a member of the universal church. Ideally, the local church is comprised only of God’s (saved) people, but the New Testament shows that this is not always the case. When one is saved though his obedience to the gospel, the Lord adds him to the universal church (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Ac. 2:47). The Lord is the One who does this adding, since He is the only One who can know whether or not a person’s conversion is genuine (2 Tim. 2:19). And of course, since the Lord is the One who does it—since there is no human element in determining who is and who isn’t added—there are no mistakes! Only those truly saved are added into the Lord’s

(universal) church! It is not this way when it comes to the local church. One becomes a member of a local church by mutual acceptance and agreement (Ac. 9:26-28). We judge one another to be faithful to the Lord, and then agree to work together as a local team.

When anyone asks to be a part of a local church (like Paul did when he first went to Jerusalem (Ac. 9:26), the local brethren must judge whether or not they consider the person to be faithful, and then either accept or reject the person based on that judgment. If accepted, then all agree to work together and the individual is added to the group. But unlike universal church membership, which is determined only by the Lord, there is a human element when it comes to determining local church membership. This human element, at times, results in faulty judgment and mistakes are made in accepting or rejecting individuals.

Sometimes, a local church rejects someone who ought to be accepted. This is what the Jerusalem church initially did with Paul: at first, they rejected Paul, “not believing that he was a disciple” (Ac. 9:26), and if Barnabas had not spoken up for Paul, they would have been refusing to receive someone that the Lord clearly accepted (cf. 3 Jn. 9-10). But the converse also occurs: sometimes we accept those that we ought to refuse! The Corinthian church, for example, accepted a fornicating brother, when God had rejected him (1 Cor. 5:1-13; cf. Rev. 2:20).

That brings me to this important practical point: your acceptance into a local church is no guarantee that you are acceptable to God! We say this because some “Christians” seem to see their membership in a local church as evidence of their acceptance with God! But please be warned: brethren, including elders, are human and cannot see into the heart! And so, they may judge you to be worthy of fellowship in the local church, when in fact, you are not...or vice versa! This is wrong: brethren should approve what God approves and disapprove what He disapproves, but it doesn’t change the facts. Local churches make mistakes in these matters; and when it happens, God knows the difference and He judges accordingly (i.e. correctly)!

Being a part of a sound local church is necessary and good; but being right with God is not guaranteed by the fact that a local church accepts me into its membership. Being right with God is determined by my own diligent obedience to the Word of my Lord and by my loyalty to Him!

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

HUNTING DOWN THE DISORDERLY

By AL DIESTELKAMP

When a brother or sister becomes unfaithful, either in lifestyle or through neglect, it's the duty of the faithful to "restore such a one" (Gal. 6:1). If the disorderly walk continues we are commanded to "withdraw" from that person (2 Thess. 3:6). It's not uncommon when attempts at restoration are made, that ones determined to continue in sin will withdraw themselves from association with Christians, including assembling.

This does not relieve the local church from the disciplinary process, but it often presents a problem. When the erring one doesn't want the confrontation, he has many tools at his disposal to avoid face-to-face exhortation. Even efforts to reach the person by phone can be easily foiled by caller ID.

I confess that I fail to understand how ones who have prayed, sang and studied with us, and have also played, laughed and ate at each other's table, can suddenly cut off all communication with us, but it does happen! The question that lingers is just how far the Lord expects us to continue to "hunt down" those who clearly don't want to be approached?

When one among us "wanders from the truth" we will try our best to "turn him back," but the sinner must want to save his soul (cf. Jas. 5:19-20). In searching for first century examples, there are no clear-cut guidelines as what to do when the sinner does not offer any opportunity to exhort

him. Aside from delivering Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan, we don't see evidence that the apostle Paul continued to pursue them. Nor do we see Jesus pursuing some of His disciples who "walked with him no more" (Jn. 6:66).

There comes a time when faithful brethren must move on, and direct their efforts to more productive pursuits, while continuing to pray for those who have turned aside, and remaining open to aiding them should they regain their senses.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT

How A 'Wise Woman Builds Her House'

PROVERBS 14:1

By STEVE FONTENOT

- **1 Tim. 5:14** ("rule the household" ASV; "manage their households" ESV) - by being a good manager of her house. Not lazy, without direction, acting only impulsively and selfishly, but accepting the role of leadership, with its rewards, disappointments, mistakes, and headaches. As with any good management there will be a basic plan and purpose (God's Word and will), and allocation of time, energy, and resources to the fulfilling of that plan.
- **Prov. 1:8** ("mother's teaching") - Providing teaching, counsel, guidance that will "grace" the children and preserve them from pitfalls (see context, vv9f). This is more than barking orders, issuing threats, or using the children as servants.
- **Prov. 23:22-25** ("Listen to...your mother... Buy truth...") - She will work to be sure her words of counsel are "truth," not simply intuition, family tradition, or something she read in a book or saw on television (Psa. 19:7-11).
- **Prov. 24:3-4** ("By wisdom a house is built... by understanding...by knowledge...") - She must equip herself with "wisdom" and "understanding" and "knowledge." How will she gain these? She will be a woman

devoted to study and meditation on the Word of God, thoughtful contemplation on its meaning and application to herself and her family, and prayer for God's assistance.

- **Prov. 29:15** ("a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother") - She will be diligent to follow up and be consistent in her discipline and not let the child "win" and "get its own way." She must be in control, with love and wisdom guiding her. Training and molding character will be the focus of her "rod and reproof."
- **Prov. 31:26-27** ("opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue") - With kind words of wisdom she "looks well to the ways of her household" and prepares them well for the "future" (v25), when they may well face the cold winds of adversity (v21). To do this, she will be industrious in preparing herself with "strength and dignity" of character (vv13-25).
- **Tit. 2:3-4** ("teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to...") - She will strive to prepare the next generation to wisely build their house by training them in God's will and plan (vv4-5).

18542 Crestline Rd., Humble, Texas 77396
e-mail: sp63@mac.com

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