



Where We Pitch Our Tents

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

April-May-June, 2013 • Volume 44, No. 2

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Is life stressful for you? Do you have time for a crisis this week? Most of us cannot imagine what it would be like to add to our already overly busy lives the pressure of taking a stand for what is right and then the stress of becoming the objects of our community's scorn. (Although that might free up some time for us.) Lot was a righteous man who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked among whom he dwelt. "That righteous man... tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Pet. 2:7,8). Do you have time for this kind of torment?

As I attempted to collect and arrange my thoughts for this article (while seated comfortably at my dining room table with a cup of hot tea at my right hand, the wife of my youth industriously making supper preparations, and my new laptop responding so effortlessly to the patter of my keystrokes), I vacantly stared out the window and tried to just think. My meditation was interrupted by a van parking across the street. The upper-teen passenger exited the van, and—as she went up the walk to the house—she lowered her sweat pants to briefly expose her buttocks, turned to look back with a playful smile at the driver of the van, and once more repeated her cheeky revelation.

I considered this to be a providential nudge to pursue the course I was on with Lot and the culture of Sodom and Gomorrah. Do not hastily assume that this prudish preacher's kid has gotten his undies in such a wad that he is ready to rain down fire and brimstone on the neighbor for a little indecent exposure. Of course not! She probably doesn't know any better. She is a product of a culture that has been gradually losing its sense of shame about nakedness for at least a century now. Instead of blushing, she giggles.

It is interesting that Peter uses the adjective *righteous* three times in reference to Lot. It is even more interesting that—from the divine perspective—the torment experienced by Lot's soul as he lived in the Sodomite culture was, in part, self-inflicted. Oh, certainly, it was the filthy conduct of the wicked among whom he lived that oppressed him; but *he* chose to move there, and—more significantly—to *stay* there and "day by day see their lawless deeds." I understand that Peter's immediate point in using the example of Lot is to demonstrate that God knows how to deliver the *godly* out of temptation (vs. 9). The grace of God *is* abundantly manifested in the story of Lot. However, if we think this means we are at liberty to carelessly graze in the well-watered "greener grass" on the other side of the spiritual fence (cf. Gen. 13:10), give our children into the hands of a godless culture (Gen. 19:8,12), and expect God to swoop in with some angels to save us from our carnal short-sightedness, then not only have we failed to learn from Lot, we haven't read Peter far enough.

In times past God spoke to men in a variety of ways (Heb. 1:1). Some even entertained angels (Gen. 19:1ff; Heb. 13:2). But God has finally spoken through His Son (1:2) Who is so much better than the angels (vs. 4)! In God's most glorious demonstration of grace to mankind, He didn't send angels. He *personally* came in the flesh to deliver us from our sins. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (2:3).

In the larger context of Peter's letter is a warning to those who had already *escaped* the pollutions of the world through Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:20). It is a warning about false teachers (vs. 1) who had forsaken the right way and gone astray (vs. 15). Such teachers speak great swelling words of emptiness and allure through the lusts of the flesh and thereby deceive even those who have already escaped (vs. 18). As

Jesus succinctly warned in a similar context, "Remember Lot's wife" (Lk. 17:32). *There* was a woman who had *escaped* but whose affections for a perishing world were stronger than her appreciation for the manifest grace of God.

How about us? Will *we* heed this divine warning in our own generation? Our nation does not appear to be listening. There is a host of teachers wearing the name of Christ who have taken up the mantle of Balaam (2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14). They are seducing many churches into feel-good harlotry. Many are more invested in the world than they are willing to admit. Most may fancy themselves too sophisticated to "moon" somebody, but many are still shamelessly uncovering their nakedness in socially acceptable ways. This is not leading but following. Are we blushing (cf. Jer. 6:15) or giggling?

For decades our culture has been redefining love to suit its lusts. Who can be surprised that it is also redefining marriage for the same reasons? Where will it stop? Without moral leadership, it won't stop until the wrath of God is poured out. At least Lot used his position "sitting in the gate" of the city (Gen. 19:1) to hospitably protect his guests and finally had the courage to confront those who would molest them saying, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly" (vs. 7). Will we speak up? The pressure to conform is only going to increase, and, despite all the public talk of tolerance, the preaching of the Word is already "out of season" and soon will not be tolerated any more than were Lot's feeble efforts (2 Tim. 4:2-4). "*This one came in to sojourn, and he keeps acting as a judge*" (Gen. 19:9). We, too, are all sojourners, right? In what direction is your tent pitched? Could *you* pull up stakes and not look back? Do you have time for that?

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

ASSISTED SPIRITUAL SUICIDE

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

It is a gross understatement to say that suicide is a tragic, misguided response to life. Those who love and respect life are shocked that anyone would prey on the vulnerable by encouraging, advocating, or even assisting suicide. Interestingly enough, most people do not find encouraging and assisting spiritual suicide as shocking or despicable.

Seeing sin as suicide—Most of us know that from the beginning the consequence has been, "...you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:15-17). Since Adam, the sin and death formula has been repeated by all of us: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Ephesians 2 calls us "...dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1-3).

The first challenge is to see sin as death—not just being sick, imperfect, only human, etc. And remember, any attempt to soften sin insults the reach and efficacy of God's grace! The second challenge is to see it as suicide. In other words, sinning is a personal choice—we choose to die, we do what brings about our own spiritual death. This is hard to accept because the burden of personal responsibility is heavy.

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezk. 18:20). Accepting the reality of personal sin is often softened by the delusion that our sin is someone else's fault. Whether it be Adam, parents, or friends who introduced you to or sold you on sin, God places the guilt on the one who chose, the one who acted—each one of us. Seeing sin as spiritual suicide should make it (and temptation) terri-

fyingly repulsive. As with physical suicide, sin is a tragic, misguided response to life!

Seeing temptation as assisted suicide—I remember the horror I felt years ago upon hearing a news story about pedestrians in a large city chanting, "Jump," to someone contemplating suicide on the ledge of a tall building. From the first sin someone has been enticing us to jump. With Eve, the devil attacked God's law, then denied the certainty of the negative consequence, and even questioned His motives. Then Eve allowed her own desires (appetite, sight, wisdom) to assist in deciding to take the final suicidal step.

We would view temptation differently if we thought of it as pushing us to commit spiritual suicide. People who are evil influences would no longer be seen as urging us to live life to its fullest, but trying to convince us to murder ourselves. False teaching becomes an invitation to your own spiritual funeral. And what about the spiritual suicidal tendencies our own words and actions encourage in others? It's no wonder Jesus said "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck,

and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Lk. 17:17). Recognizing the death consequence of sin changes everything!

Seeing spiritual suicide's second-chance—Physical suicide is permanent, a one-way trip. It is right to call sin suicide because, but for the grace of God, it also is a one-way trip. Thinking of the normal permanence of suicide can help us appreciate what God accomplished in redeeming us. "For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). What an "incredible gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).

We were dead, but now are alive in Christ. We chose death, now we can choose life. We followed others who proclaimed death disguised as life, but now we follow Jesus Who is "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn. 14:6). It is not within our power to reverse suicide, but it *is* within God's power. Why choose death? Why live in death? We've all sinned—we've all committed spiritual suicide, but incredibly, through Jesus we don't all have to die! "...I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!" (Ezk. 18:31).

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

Churches "of Christ" and the Needy

By STEVE FONTENOT

Who are churches of Christ authorized to relieve? The only way to know is to appeal to the Scriptures. The Christians in the Jerusalem church were "selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with *all*, as *anyone* might have need" (Ac. 2:45). Who were the "all" and "anyone" *in the context*? They are the same ones being discussed in vv. 41-44: "...*those who had received his word were baptized*; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe...and *all those who had believed* were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with *all*, as *anyone* might have need."

The Jerusalem church provided so that "there was not a needy person *among them*, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to *each*, as *any had need*" (Ac. 4:34-35). "Among them" = "*the congregation of those who believed*" (v.32).

The disciples in the church in Antioch "determined to send a contribution for the relief of the *brethren* living in Judea" (Ac. 11:29).

A collection was made by churches in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia for needy in Jerusalem. *Seven times* it is said this collection was for needy "*saints*" (Rom. 15:25,26,31; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:4:9:1,12). To say Paul used this for the relief of someone else (non-saints) is to accuse Paul of a misappropriation of funds. Whereas there had been an age-old racial barrier between Jews and Gentiles, many thanksgivings were being given to God for the liberality manifested by these Gentile churches toward their Jewish brethren, be they in Jerusalem or anywhere else, "unto them and unto all" (2 Cor. 9:13).

Timothy, the evangelist in Ephesus, was to "let not the church be burdened" with the relief of widows with children and grandchildren, "so that it may assist those who are *widows indeed*" (1 Tim. 5:16). "Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone *has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day*" (1 Tim. 5:5).

In the New Testament, churches "of Christ" provided for needy "in Christ."

18542 Crestline Rd., Humble, Texas 77396
e-mail: sp63@mac.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
260 N. Aspen Dr., P.O.Box 151
Cortland, IL 60112-0151
(815) 756-9840

E-mail aldiestel@gmail.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

'SEGREGATION' IN A SECOND-HAND STORE

By KARL DIESTELKAMP

There I was, in a second-hand store to search through its many books. To my surprise, all of the books were arranged according to the color of the covers. Talk about giving new meaning to the phrase, "don't judge a book by its cover!"

I thought, wouldn't it have been strange to say to my wife, "Honey, I'm going to the store to see if can find some *green* books to go with my all *green* library." And, after going there to come home and say, "I'm back, and you won't believe this. I ran into a guy who was looking for *yellow* books to go with his all *yellow* library. And you know what? We agreed to help each other—if I come across any *yellow* books I will send them to him and if he finds any *green* books he will send them to me—only he does not want any *dark yellow* books and I admitted that I did not really want any *pale green* books either. Neither of us want any of those 'shabby' little *cheap books* or ones that have been *badly used* or that are *stained*." That would be as absurd as arranging books by the color of the covers in the first place.

But those books got me to thinking about local churches. The archaic notion that certain brethren would "be more comfortable" in a congregation made up of people more like themselves (whatever that means) is still around in some places. No, most would not admit that the color of the "cover" was really the issue or that some of the people we fail to embrace or encourage are "shabby" and "cheap" and have been "badly used" in life or are too "stained" for our tastes, but it does happen. While "language" and "geographic location" may at times determine the makeup of a local church, culture, social status, economic achievement, ethnic composition, academic standing and skin color should not be used to deliberately attract only certain ones and to exclude others.

In Christ, "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). We have "put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10,11). *All such distinctions are erased in Christ.* The world uses these artificial, separating barriers for its advantage, but Christians are forbidden to do so.

Peter declared, "...of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is acceptable to

him" (Ac. 10:34,35). The gospel is to be preached "to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15); and we are to "make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). That includes those who may have had an unsavory past, like some in Corinth of whom Paul said, "such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). And, for that matter, like all of us as well, who "have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

If the Lord has received those who have been "washed" and "sanctified" and "justified," on what grounds could I possibly refuse them, or discourage them? If we consider ourselves to be "strong." Paul wrote, "Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not

to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying...Wherefore *receive ye one another*, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:1,2,7).

If we are tempted to make distinctions between people over superficial differences, we "become judges with evil thoughts...if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jas. 2:1-11).

Now back to the color of the books. I did not even look for a single book among the colorful "factions" on the shelves. That is not the way I search for a good book. Likewise, the church of the Lord has no "color."

You make the applications!

8311 - 27th Ave., Kenosha, Wisconsin 53144
e-mail: kdiestel@execpc.com

Oh, Really, Mr. O'Reilly! The Spin Stops Where?

By AL DIESTELKAMP

For well over a decade *The O'Reilly Factor* on the FOX News Channel has been, by far, the highest rated cable news show on television. Its host, Bill O'Reilly, though highly educated, often reminds his guests that he is just "a simple man." In his attempt to get simple, straightforward answers, he has declared his program as a "No-Spin Zone."

While much of his focus is on political issues, he sometimes delves into moral and spiritual topics as well. As a frequent viewer of his nightly program, I appreciate much of what he advocates. For instance, he is an eloquent and vocal opponent of abortion, and he speaks out frequently against attempts to eliminate God from our nation.

That being said, I take exception to his attempts to explain away biblical accounts of creation and other Old Testament events as merely "allegorical." A recent 10-hour TV mini-series titled, *The Bible*, caught his attention. Though the series is riddled with inaccuracies, it does portray the events as actual. O'Reilly invited Robert Jeffress, the "pastor" of First Baptist Church of Dallas, to represent the "fundamentalist" viewpoint on his program.

O'Reilly began by questioning his guest as to whether the story of Adam and Eve, as one example, should be taken literally. To this Jeffress confessed his belief that they were actual people. This prompted O'Reilly to reveal his Catholic schooling

which taught him to "spin" many of the Old Testament stories as "allegorical." He opined, "A whale swallowing Jonah for three days? *That doesn't happen!*" His guest pointed out that Jesus connected the actuality of His own future resurrection with the fact that Jonah was "three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish," but O'Reilly conveniently shrugged that off.

O'Reilly brought up the debate over the age of the earth, expressing his belief that God created everything, but did so through the process of evolution. Whether Jeffress totally agreed with him is not clear, but sadly, O'Reilly was able to get him to concede that the earth is at least 13 billion years old.

Bill O'Reilly has co-authored several books, including *Killing Lincoln* and *Killing Kennedy*, both of which have been "best sellers," and the former having already been adapted into a movie broadcast on the History Channel. He has since announced that his next book will be *Killing Jesus*, indicating that it will relate the true story. I've got news for him: That book has already been written! If he relies on the only reliable source for the death of Jesus he will be hard-pressed to write a book with enough pages to warrant the \$28 price he plans to charge.

Unfortunately, I'm sure he will not limit himself to the Bible as his source, and the result will be a book containing some truth, many embellishments and inaccuracies based on tradition and imagination. *That* will be the ultimate example of "spin."

Psalm 92 and 'Going to Church'

By KEITH BARCLAY

The Psalms are a wonderful mirror in which we can see our true spiritual condition. The Psalmists, whether David, Asaph, Moses or one of the anonymous writers, give us insight like no other writers of scripture. They speak of worship, repentance, recompense, relationship and reward. Righteous living and worship are central, especially worship, since the Psalms were to be included in the temple worship of ancient Israel.

The 92nd Psalm is no exception. This is entitled "a song for the Sabbath" and within its verses is a wealth of praise and practical help for the believer.

Thanksgiving and praise open this Psalm. How often do we open (begin) our day with thanksgiving and praise? Yet the Psalmist urges us to do so morning and evening (v.2). The motivation for our thanksgiving and praise is God's steadfast love and faithfulness (ESV). Scripture demonstrates these traits of our creator throughout the historical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles (each, one book rather than two, in their original form). Repeatedly God proves His love and faithfulness and Israel was to remember that, not only in Sabbath worship, but also in personal worship every morning and evening. How much less should we thank and praise our God for the ultimate in love and faithfulness in the sending of His Son and the provision of salvation Jesus brings?

God's work is extolled and it is made

clear that there will be those who will not understand nor appreciate what our God has done. The English Standard Version is very blunt in this regard, "The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this..." (v.6). Surely we have no desire to among that number.

What does result from those so inclined are the wicked and evildoers who will sprout and flourish but who will ultimately be doomed forever (v.7). This demonstrates God's faithfulness and steadfast love for those who do know and understand, and who, as a result, live righteously. The Lord, who is on high forever, will see His enemies scattered and perish. What comfort this brings to those who have suffered at the hands of the wicked (vs. 10-11).

This brings us to the practical portion of the Psalm and to the portion which demands that I quit "going to church"! "What was that?" you ask! You read correctly, we must stop "going to church." This text suggest that faithfulness under Moses' covenant was accomplished by simply visiting the temple on occasion. They were not people who made an appearance at the temple or synagogue on the Sabbath. These are people who are described as having been "planted" in the house of the Lord (v.13a). They "flourish" in the courts of our God (v.13b).

Consider those terms. They suggest far more than a weekly appearance at an assembly. These terms suggest someone who understands the significance of God's steadfast love, faithfulness and work. As a result they firmly plant themselves (the tree metaphors of the text) in God's house. It is where they reside, not someplace they visit. They relish their place there because there is no other place they would rather be. Morning and evening they praise their God and give Him thanks. As you look into

this Psalm does it reflect similarly your attitude toward God and His house today—the church? Are you planted there and do you flourish?

A remarkable thing about being planted and flourishing is that even in one's old age one will bear fruit. We are ever green and growing, or we are dead (v.14). What a blessing! Do we appreciate those among us who, though age may have them bent and their body broken, continue to bear fruit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). Our tendency is to dismiss them as having passed their prime and no longer able to be relevant. The Psalmist declares the "planted" one who "flourishes," though aged, is still of great value.

This is missed by those described in vs. 6-7. Eternity is missed by them as well. In the Lord's house we experience a taste of eternity as we acknowledge God's love, faithfulness and work. We offer to Him thanksgiving, praise and a life filled with righteousness morning and evening, planted and flourishing in His house.

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

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:

Printing & supplies	\$ 85.00
Postage (U.S. & Canada)	388.83
Return Postage (16)	7.21
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 481.04
Funds available for past issue	1,513.38
Surplus	\$ 1,032.34

Donations: (as of 3/25)

Jerry & Sue Brewer, AL	\$ 50.00
Lisa J. Topel, OH	15.00
Robert & Marjorie Springborg, IL	15.00
Anonymous, MO	25.00
Roger Hillis, KY	30.00
Ed Lewis, NC	100.00
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 235.00
Surplus from past issue	1,032.34
Funds for this issue	\$ 1,267.34

We are very grateful to God for our voluntary partners, past and present, whose donations make this publication possible. With the recent increase in the costs of both domestic and foreign postage, this issue is expected to cost approximately \$535, which would leave a surplus of about \$732 toward future issues.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

P.O. Box 151 • Cortland, IL 60112-0151

Return Service Requested

SAVE the DATE

MEN'S OVERNIGHT BIBLE STUDY
SOUTH OF BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS
SEPTEMBER 27 & 28, 2013

DECLARING GOD'S STRENGTH TO THE NEXT GENERATION

TWELVE LESSONS FROM...

SEWELL HALL BOYD SELLERS L.A. STAUFFER
KARL DIESTELKAMP JOE NOVAK AL DIESTELKAMP

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
www.mensstudy.org

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