



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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A ONE-TALENT CHURCH

By **KARL DIESTELKAMP**

Trying to justify something which a church is doing and has been called into question causes some people to latch onto a passage of scripture, take it out of its context, and use it as though it is proof for what they do.

Consider the practice of taking funds contributed into the common treasury on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1,2) and investing those funds in CDs or interest-bearing accounts and then citing Jesus' parable of the "talents" (Matt. 25:14-30) as justification.

In the parable, a man "going into another country" delivered his goods to three servants, "to each according to his several ability," and went away. The first servant was given five "talents" (money) and "traded" and gained five more talents. The second servant was given two talents and likewise gained another two. The third servant was given one talent and, being afraid, hid the talent in the earth, *doing nothing with it*. When the master of those servants returned, he called them to give account for the money that had been entrusted to them. He commended the first two and rewarded them for their efforts. The third admitted that he had done nothing with his talent and tried to blame his master for his failure. Before his master cast out that unprofitable servant, he said, "...you ought therefore to have put my money to the bankers, that at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest" (v.27).

Some brethren seize upon this verse to justify investing the Lord's money solely for the purpose of earning interest rather than using it in the work of the gospel. Hundreds of thousands of dollars rest comfortably in such accounts. In the meantime, deserving gospel preachers around the world are in need of support. In some churches, efforts to reach the lost in their own community and edify the members are at a virtual standstill and needy Christians are denied

assistance because someone has a tight grip on the interest-bearing treasury "purse strings."

What's Wrong With This Picture?

It is a misuse and abuse of Matthew 25:27. The Lord's church and the treasury of the church are not even remotely included in this parable. Check the context: Matt. 24:45-51 is about an evil servant—an *individual*. Matt. 25:1-13 is about five wise and five foolish virgins—*individuals*—waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. Matt. 25:14-30 is about three servants—*individuals*."

What was Christ's message in this parable? Was he *really* giving financial advice to churches about investment? If that was not his point, then it cannot be our point, and we must not violate the context and expand the intended application for some other purpose. The obvious application concerns personal ability and opportunity given to us by the Lord and our use of that ability and opportunity to its fullness.

To be consistent, those who cite verse 27 as their "proof text" would have to say that the "one talent" servant represents a "one talent church" and the "talent" represents the treasury of that church. Would that mean the other two servants each represent a "five talent church" and a "two talent church"? Would that mean that the masters' commendation of those two servants would authorize churches to go into business and "trade" to make money for the Master? By the way, by what means will the Master receive the "interest" in those savings accounts when he comes?

Of course, all of this is nonsense! There is no such thing as a "one talent church." Matt. 25:14-30 is about profitable and unprofitable *individuals*.

Those who see themselves as caretakers and custodians of a church treasury may say, "It is none of your business what we are doing." But it is the Lord's business and it is the Lord's money. It is right to warn

those who stubbornly hoard his money that there will come a time of accounting to the Lord. The continuing context (Matt. 25:31-46) shows that we will stand before the Lord in judgment as *individuals*.

There must be open transparency on the part of those who are involved in handling the Lord's money. When he was raising funds (benevolence) for needy Christians, the apostle Paul went to great lengths to assure the Corinthian church that "avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us: for we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:16-21).

That being said, the right thing to do is to make a regular financial statement (report) available to all of the members of the church. Why not, if everything is open and "above board"? This is not charging that there is dishonesty or fraud—it is protection against such charges. *All* of the members have a right to know the full financial status of the church *and should insist on knowing*, and those handling the money should want them to know.

A few misguided souls take the position that the treasury cannot be used to assist *local* members who are in need. Such people need to read Acts 4:32-37 about the Jerusalem church. "...For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need." Those who have a stranglehold on the treasury may say, "But there are conditions." No doubt! There must be "need."

I fear souls may be lost because some are unwilling to spend the Lord's money to spread the gospel to the lost and erring and because there are those who sit on the Lord's money as though it belonged to them rather than to Him.

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Changing Attitudes Toward Fellowship

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Back when I was a young preacher in my 30s, a lady “pastor” issued a challenge to me by saying, “Give me 15 minutes in your pulpit and I’ll convince the congregation that instrumental music in worship is not wrong.” Little did she realize that if I had given her even one minute in the pulpit, I would have received my “walking papers.” I told her that she didn’t know my brethren and that, even if she were to convince me that instrumental music was authorized, if I voiced that from the pulpit it would likely be my last sermon there.

That was then...but this is now.

How things have changed in 40 years! While there has been no obvious change in practice in most congregations, I am finding more and more brethren who “have no problem” with the use of instruments in worship or with public leadership roles for women. Some are even calling on us to expand our fellowship to include “other Christians” who “misunderstand” the purpose of baptism.

A few years after the above-mentioned incident, I was in a gathering of gospel preachers who were commenting on the trend in congregations to abandon the practice of holding evangelistic meetings. I was shocked to hear one preacher say, “There’s no need for evangelistic meetings anymore because we have nothing to offer that other churches don’t offer.” Knowing him, I just shrugged that off as a result of his own liberal attitude toward the scriptures. As the decades have passed, we now are seeing similar attitudes among us.

It’s not like we had no warning. I am reminded that in the 1990s brother F. LaGard Smith wrote a number of books, including *The Cultural Church, Radical Restoration* and *Who Is My Brother?*, all warning of

changing attitudes among members of the Lord’s church. Brother Smith is of my generation (three years younger) and had a similar upbringing (a preacher’s kid who never lived long in one place). His first two years of higher education were at Florida College where all four of my children and most of my grandchildren have attended.

Brother Smith took a different path than I. Continuing his education, he became a lawyer and, later, a law professor; and his experience and influence has been mostly among brethren who have chosen a more liberal stance than I on several issues. I have no doubt that his very conservative upbringing is reflected in his writings, which challenged some of the changes he saw among those with whom he has worshipped.

Though I read it when it was first published, I am re-reading brother Smith’s book *Who Is My Brother?*. While I am not giving wholesale endorsement of everything he says in the book, much of what he writes is helpful, especially regarding the trend toward ecumenism in the church. He details a “quiet revolution” that was taking place among brethren with whom he worshiped at that time, noting the engine behind it was a strong desire to expand spiritual fellowship to—and count as brothers—those in sectarian or independent churches whose members have faith in Jesus Christ but have not been baptized “for the remission of sins.”

Though it has been slower in coming, it should be no surprise that there has been a “trickle down” effect among those of us who have taken a more conservative route.

While I understand the *desire* to be in fellowship with my sincere religious friends and neighbors, I must not allow that desire to trump my love for the truth as revealed in the scriptures. Furthermore, the apostle John wrote about one who “does not abide in the doctrine of Christ” and warned that to “receive him” is sharing in his “evil deeds” (2 Jn. 9-11). Teaching what is not in accord with the scriptures is classified as “evil deeds.” If the one teaching error is merely mistaken, it is our obligation to take him aside and “explain to him the way of God more accurately” (Ac. 18:26) rather than overlook his error in order to enjoy fellowship with him.

The apostle Paul marveled that some in his day were turning to “a different gospel” which he further described as a “perverted gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). I am likewise amazed at those today who are willing to tolerate gospel perversions such as “salvation by faith alone” and tenets of Calvinism in an effort to promote ecumenism.

Those who develop this overwhelming desire to expand fellowship to all who believe in Jesus, regardless of whether they have been baptized for the remission of sins, are inclined to feel “offended” by preaching against false doctrines. They will claim that such preaching and teaching does not “edify” them, so “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4), even if they have to leave the Lord’s church.

In the same context as the foregoing warning, Timothy (and each gospel preacher) is charged by the apostle Paul to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Such is not a time to shrink back from declaring “the whole counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27).

Spitting Out The Seeds

As he approached his own “departure” (2 Tim. 4:6) the apostle Paul issued a command to his “true and beloved son in the faith” (2 Tim. 1:2) to “Hold fast the pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Jesus warned of men arising who would “deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). The apostle John wrote about some who opposed the truth, saying, “They went out from us, but were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 Jn. 2:19).

We have some today—both in and out of the Lord’s church—who deny the pattern of sound words. There are popular authors and bloggers who are getting the attention of many Christians by their “smooth words and flattering speech” (Rom. 16:18). While much of what they are writing has a ring of truth to it, at the same time they deny or ignore the “pattern of sound words” regarding God’s plan of salvation.

I enjoy reading what other men have to say about spiritual matters. However, I have learned that, like eating watermelon, I can enjoy the fruit but need to spit out the seeds. Unfortunately, too many seem to be unwilling to spit out the seeds of error that are offered by men who are perverting the gospel (Gal. 1:7).

~Al Diestelkamp

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Questions & Answers About Church Socials

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

Two questions are asked:

1) Why doesn't the church have more socials?; and 2) Why can't we have parties in the church building?

The New Testament authorizes every act and activity of the church. It provides us with all that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). It completely authorizes us in "every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In worship and work, all that God wants is made known by the "oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). We must not add to or take from the word of God (Rev. 22:18-19), and we must not "go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6).

Social activities are not included in the authorized acts of the church. It is very good to have social functions, but they are "home activities." If there are not enough of such, then the homes are failing. Let us not push upon the church that responsibility which belongs to the home. If it is advisable that Christians associate together more, then let us not fail to provide such association, but let us keep it independent of church functions.

But some ask, "Since the church building

is not sacred, and since our homes are not large enough to accommodate large groups, why can't we use the building?

Agreed, the church building is not sacred. On the other hand, it is not a carnal, worldly place either. Money for the building was given to be used in a spiritual work. Remember, we do not object to eating in the church building, but we do object to making the church building an "eating place." It is not wrong to laugh in the church building, but it is certainly wrong to make it a "house of laughter." The church house is not "the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15), but it is God's house (Jn. 2:16).

The house in which I live is not sacred, but some things are not appropriate there. A doctor's office is not sacred, but who would say it would be good to repair automobiles there? A hospital and a sheet metal shop don't belong in the same building. So the church and the world should not be housed from the same treasury.

A drinking fountain, a restroom, or a nursery is made to expedite a spiritual service. But a social hall is to give vent to a social urge. Pews, classrooms, lights and fans are purposefully paid for by the church because of their usefulness in aiding

us to do what God said for us to do, but for the congregation to provide recreational facilities does not contribute to the doing of that which God directed the church to do.

Paul wrote: "What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22). He was condemning the practice of making a feast with the Lord's Supper, but at the same time he gave us the necessary inference that there is a difference between homes and meeting places provided for by the church.

Let us keep the church in the "church business." It is always safe to do that which we know is right without addition or substitution. Let us use every facility we have to expedite the Lord's work, and let us avoid anything that would minimize its nature which is altogether spiritual.

As long as we do right, our "home activities" are not governed by the Bible,* but we only do right in church work when we are authorized by precept or example in God's word. [*see note below]

"Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:10), "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *I don't believe my father's wording of this sentence adequately conveys what he intended to say. Having grown up in his house I can testify that he believed home activities are governed by the Bible, but he understood that the Bible is not as restrictive on what we do in the home as with the work of the church.*

You Can Teach An Old Dog New Tricks

By **DOUG CYRUS**

I recently met a seven year old boy who told his father something that I thought was rather profound. He said, "Daddy, I know how to drive, I just can't reach the pedals yet." To think you "know," when you really do not, is a common trait of humanity and affects all ages. It has been said, "In life we often see things the way we are, not necessarily the way things really are." "Oh, to be young and know it all!"

When we are young, our lack of experience can lead us to *think* we know it all. Thus, we see life through the limited "tunnel vision" of ignorance. As we get older, life knocks us down a notch or two and forces knowledge upon us. As we begin to see how simplistic we are, if humility sets in, we will jokingly admit, "When I was young, I thought I knew it all!"

If we choose not to humble ourselves so we can see our limitations, chances are we will be stuck in the same mental state for the rest of our lives. I remember my mother giving me the warning, "He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool; shun him!" God created life's experiences

to kick us over and over again in the very same ways, attempting to enlighten us until we learn. Then we get to move on to the next lesson.

Peter tells us, "...be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5). Paul tells us, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, *teaching us...*" (Tit. 2:11-12). Here God's grace provides knowledge by *teaching us*. So we see that God's "*teaching grace*" is the unearned gift of knowledge that is given to the humble. Why does God give knowledge to the humble? Possibly the proud think too highly of themselves to receive the gift of God's knowledge? They don't think they need God's knowledge. They *think* they have it all figured out. Paul plainly tells us, "knowledge puffs up..." (1 Cor. 8:1).

So, here is the trap we fall into. As we humble ourselves in life so that we can receive God's gifts of knowledge, the knowledge itself can remove our humility, elevate us to the class of the "puffed up proud," and prevent us from gaining further knowledge. When we become "puffed up" in life, we "see things the way we are and not neces-

sarily the way they really are." We stop seeing the truth, but we just don't realize it. Why does Paul tell us that it's possible to be "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"? One reason is that we choose, *selectively*, what to learn based on what we *think* we already know. My deceased brother used to occasionally repeat the saying, "It's the things you learn after you know it all that really make the difference."

Thus Solomon warns us, "Cease listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge." It is fortunate that Solomon also instructs us, *without an age limit*, to "apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge." It is true—we do see life the way we are—but we can choose to view life using glasses either tinted with humility or prideful superiority. Though we all may know how to drive, perhaps we should occasionally, humbly, ask ourselves if we are really reaching the pedals. With an occasional dose of humility, perhaps we "old dogs" can continue to "learn new tricks."

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Prayer in the Public Forum

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Certainly, from a purely earth-bound perspective, prayer would appear to be no more than talking to oneself or going through some kind of meditative mental exercise. Yet, for believers in a supernatural Creator, prayer is the effort of the spiritual mind to communicate with the One in Whose image we were created (Gen. 1:27). As such, prayer implies a dependence upon God for our existence, our current needs, and our future hopes. Prayer is a logical extension of faith in a God Who hears and is responsive to our praise of and appeals to Him.

Because prayer demonstrates faith in God, it is met with controversy in the public forum, "For not all have faith," and the many who have *some* faith do not all have the *same* faith. Therefore, conflict is inevitable. So, shall we stop praying? This is simply not an option for people of faith. To refrain from expressing faith in an effort to be sensitive to all other beliefs essentially nullifies one's alleged faith. Thus, the call to remove faith in God from public display under the guise of peace and harmony is actually an effort to neutralize the role of faith in God.

It is a great irony that many of the very legislatures and courts which have placed restrictions on public prayer still open their own sessions with prayer. Their chambers are graced with expressions of faith etched in stone and carved in wood. Many of their authoritative documents acknowledge the

Divine. Their pledge of allegiance affirms submission to God, and they often swear by Him in their oaths.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled, "The opening of sessions of legislative and other deliberative public bodies with prayer is deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country. From colonial times through the founding of the Republic and ever since, the practice of legislative prayer has coexisted with the principles of disestablishment and religious freedom" (*Marsh v. Chambers*, 1983).

The fact that faith in God and prayer to Him *have* been significant threads in our nation's historical fabric is unquestioned. That faith in God and prayer continue to be woven into our culture is obvious. That expressions of faith have often led (and still lead) to philosophical and spiritual conflicts is undeniable. Yet, conflict is not sufficient reason to attempt to restrict prayer.

Still, for fear of perceived insensitivity, disrespect, and potential conflict, significant restrictions are placed on those who are asked to lead public prayer in governmental settings. Never mind the fact that individual legislators may say whatever they wish and it does not constitute a government establishment of anything.

For example, those who are invited to give an invocation to open a session of the Illinois House of Representatives are advised "that federal courts have placed certain restrictions" on this activity. Among other things, "prayers...must not be used to...advance any one faith or belief..." However, if prayer means anything, then this is essentially impossible.

To pray to God and invoke His divine guidance implies and advances faith in God. To remove prayer from the context of faith in a God Who hears is to reduce

prayer to a meaningless tradition that is most unreasonable. Unfortunately, I suspect that this is exactly as some people would have it. Either the government should cease making a pretense of invoking divine guidance, or it should allow prayer to be a sincere expression of faith amongst the philosophies that shape our nation.

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-3). "Finally, brethren pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith" (2 Thess. 3:1,2).

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Save the Date for the 2014 Men's Overnight Bible Study

The 11th Annual Men's Overnight Bible Study is scheduled for Friday-Saturday, September 26-27, at a campsite in Wapella, Illinois.

Details are still being worked out, but the theme will revolve around having a worthy walk as is urged in Ephesians 4:1-3.

Mark your calendars and expect more information in the next issue of *Think*. As we get closer to the date, you can get updates and register online at:

www.mensstudy.org

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