

**“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

**Philippians 2:4**



*Philippians 4:8*

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## *Christians, ‘Ask Not...’*

**By AL DIESTELKAMP**

One of the most memorable of presidential quotations came from John F. Kennedy in his inaugural address when he issued the challenge, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Even though it has since been claimed that President Kennedy “borrowed and adapted” this line from one of his former headmasters of a prestigious school he attended, it must be admitted that it made a powerful point. The statement was interpreted as a call for sacrifice and service by Americans, for America.

Please excuse me as I also “borrow and adapt” the famous couplet in issuing a similar challenge to Christians: Ask not what your congregation can do for you; ask what you can do for your congregation.

Most people, and especially Christians, would agree that selfishness is a problem. Actually, it is more than just a problem; it is a sinful “work of the flesh” (Gal. 5:20). Yet, too often important decisions are based primarily on self-interest.

Much of the religious world appeal to self-interest when it uses a market-driven approach in “church plantings.” Therefore, it’s no wonder that such churches end up resembling businesses or social clubs more than what Jesus built. After several decades of this approach, the general population has come to expect all churches to “minister” to their social and economic needs. They are pleased to respond to the self-centered phrase, “Attend the church of your choice,” and ignore the church of God’s choice.

We frequently have visitors who attend our worship assemblies or inquire about the church as they look for a “church home.” With little or no concern for doctrinal issues, they want to know what “programs” we offer to babysit their children or entertain their teenagers. Our willingness to offer

Bible classes and scriptural worship just doesn’t fulfill their perceived “needs.”

With the ease of mobility offered to us in our modern world, Christians in some areas have the ability to choose from among a number of faithful congregations with which to worship and work. In many metropolitan areas where job opportunities attract Christians to locate, it is not unusual for them to be faced with a decision as to which congregation with which they will identify themselves.

What should be the determining factor in making such a choice? Of course, of first importance should be whether the congregation is faithful to the word of God both in doctrine and practice. Assuming there is more than one option within that criteria, a choice must still be made. There have been a number of cases in which Christians have asked for my advice when faced with that dilemma. In cases where I am advising spiritually mature Christians my response has always been to ask, “Where are you needed the most?”

However, I’ve noticed that most people don’t take that into consideration. Too often, they look to see what the congregation can do for them rather than what they can do to benefit another congregation. Many will choose to pass by a nearby struggling congregation to identify with a larger congregation for any number of self-satisfying reasons.

Too often, whether we like to admit it or not, the decision is based on the socioeconomic, racial or ethnic makeup of congregations. The “birds of a feather flock together” proverb is not biblical and has no legitimate place in God’s kingdom (Jas. 2:1-7).

Some who have been used to worshipping in fine surroundings may experience a bit of culture shock when attending a congregation that meets in rented facilities or an outdated building, so they are willing to

go out of their way to identify with another congregation whose meeting place is more to their liking.

Congregations which are lacking scripturally-qualified men to serve as elders often find that this deters some from identifying with them. That might appear to be a more legitimate reason than some others, but that might be all the more reason they need mature Christians to help them develop to the point where they can help “set in order the things that are lacking” (Tit. 1:5).

Christians with children often avoid congregations lacking other children, insuring perpetuation of the problem in the childless congregation. Little do they realize that if they were to join such a work, the next family to face that decision would not be able to use that reason to go elsewhere.

Even before this article is printed, I can almost hear people say, “I’ve got to do what is best for me and my family!” Let me challenge your thinking about that. Admittedly, it is good for children to be able to associate with other children of like faith, but there are other ways to provide that association. Visiting other congregations’ special meetings and singings is a good way to satisfy this need, and there’s nothing keeping families from hosting social gatherings involving young people (and older people) from other area congregations.

If you are truly spiritually mature, your family can thrive even in less-than-ideal surroundings and may actually be more useful to the cause of Christ by working with a group that really needs you and your family. The children in families that are fully engaged in a congregation where they are needed will be more likely to become committed Christians than those whose families seek a “featherbed” situation.

Don’t even get me started on preachers who choose where to work based on self-interest!

# The Positive Side of Discipline

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Professing Christians agree that being a disciple of Jesus is a good and positive thing. Yet we often have a very negative association with the very thing that is required of every faithful disciple: discipline. Discipline is “training that corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties or moral character;” “instruction having for its aim to form the pupil to proper conduct and action;” or “correction, chastisement, punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.”

Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Unfortunately, rather than hearing Jesus’ call for self-denial as a gracious invitation full of hope, all too many of us perceive self-denial as a negative thing.

Was Jesus’ self-denial in going to the cross a negative thing? While having some negative associations and implications from an earthly perspective, from the divine perspective Jesus’ crucifixion was ultimately glorious in what it accomplished (Heb. 12:2). When we glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, we find no pleasure in its cruelty and brutality; we do find joy and hope in what it meant and what it accomplished (Gal. 6:14).

This, then, is the nature of discipline. “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). We love and admire the fruit of good discipline. Every parent envisions his/her child growing to maturity with strength and success. Yet—if that vision is to become reality—it will require discipline, for “a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).

Instead of practicing discipline, many people want their undisciplined lives to be not only tolerated but affirmed and validated as legitimate. They label any discipline in the form of correction as being judgmental. Many people misapply Jesus’ condemnation of unrighteous judgment (Matt. 7:1-5) as a means of deflecting any application of the Word of God being made to their lifestyles. So—while we affirm the practical importance, need, and long-term value of discipline—we may still seek to avoid it for as long as possible.

We must keep the goal of discipline fixed in our minds. That picture of the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” must be ever before us in order to motivate us to exercise self-discipline. A church in fellowship focused on the salvation and growth of “one another” will submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21) and discipline one another through instruction and correction from the Word of God (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-4:2; Heb. 10:24,25, etc.). Yet, of all the realms of discipline, parental discipline is primary. The failure of parents to instruct, train, correct, chastise, and punish their children in

the fear of the Lord is the primary cause of a lack of self-discipline in the lives of individuals and our families, communities, and churches. No nation, no school, no family, and no church can be expected to instill in children the self-discipline which parents fail to provide in the crucial formative years. People may blame the media, the schools, the churches, the culture, their children’s friends, etc.; but,—generally speaking—the failure of parents to teach and exemplify self-discipline is the source of our societal woes.

We need to change. We need to make a conscious decision not to react negatively to the word, concept, or action of discipline. Discipline must become a positive word in our minds and vocabulary so that we will not flinch when we hear it. The potential fruit of good discipline should motivate us to be eager and diligent in pushing past any momentary unpleasantness. That’s what Jesus did for us. That’s what we should do for ourselves, our children, and one another.

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## THINK ON THESE THINGS

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### Articles From the Days Gone By

## HOW IMPORTANT IS TRUTH?

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

Some people think that true religion is dependent only upon sincerity. Certainly sincerity is a vital part of true religion. Without sincerity, all religion is a vain show—a useless effort. Indeed, perhaps insincerity may be one of the greatest faults among professing Christians.

However, sincerity *alone* is not sufficient to make any religion a true one, pure before God. *Truth* is another factor. Without truth, sincerity is likewise vain and useless. For example, who believes a doctor is capable simply because he is sincere? Everyone recognizes, even without an argument, that he must abide in principles of truth. Even a druggist or a banker, a judge or a teacher, a farmer or an engineer, must accompany sincerity with truth.

Our soul’s salvation is dependent on God’s abundant grace and *our sincere obedience to truth*. Sincere obedience to false teaching will never produce Christians. Sincere practice of false ways in work and worship will never constitute acceptable service to God.

Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). Truth that is unknown never did make any man free. Jesus did not simply say that the truth would make us free, but that *known truth* would do so.

Again Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

Paul emphasized the importance of truth when he wrote: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

*This article was first published in the West Side Aurora, Illinois Bulletin, November, 1964*

# 'Getting Baptized'

By RICK LIGGIN

The use of metaphors in our speech is not only quite common, it is also quite helpful. In fact, it is so common and helpful that even God uses a healthy dose of metaphor in communicating His message to man. Jesus, for example, used hyperbole (overstatement) when He said that we must "hate" father and mother, sister and brother, and even our own lives if we want to be His disciples (Lk. 14:26). When the prodigal son confessed, "Father, I have sinned against *heaven* (i.e. God) and in your sight" (Lk. 15:18), he used metonymy (where one thing is used, but another is meant: he said "heaven," but he meant "God"). So, please understand: I am not opposed at all to the use of metaphors, but I must tell you that I am becoming quite concerned about our frequent use of one specific metaphor.

Synecdoche is a common figure of speech used in most languages. It is a legitimate and useful metaphor wherein a *part* is used to represent (or stand for) the *whole*. For example, when Luke recorded that the disciples at Troas met on the first day of the week to "break bread" (Ac. 20:7), he used synecdoche: a *part* of the Lord's Supper (the bread) was used to represent the *whole* of the Lord's Supper. A similar example is seen when we say, "Let's stop and get a *bite* to eat." In making this statement, we use synecdoche: we do not literally mean that we only want one "bite" of food; we are using "bite" to represent the whole meal.

Now, it has become a common practice among some of us to use this metaphor when speaking about the process involved in our response to the gospel. The New Testament clearly teaches that when the gospel is preached, it will produce faith in those with good and honest hearts (Rom. 10:17). That faith then motivates the believer to repent of his sins (Ac. 17:30-31), verbally confess his faith (Rom. 10:9-10), and then express his faith in a willingness to be baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins (Ac. 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27). In my judgment, it is unfortunate that a useful "five step" teaching tool (hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized) has become a kind of rote (almost creedal) answer among us to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Sadly, many of us really do believe that there are only "five steps" in the "plan of salvation." But as disturbing as that is to me, what concerns me more is the fact that "baptism" seems to have become the "single step" in the "plan of salvation."

I am afraid that what has happened is that we have used "baptism" as a kind of synecdoche for the process of salvation:

baptism has come to stand for the whole of what our response must be if we want to be saved by the gospel. Now, please understand, I do not oppose using "baptism" as a kind of synecdoche in this way. The New Testament itself uses synecdoche in this same way, though it more typically uses "faith" or "belief" to stand for the whole process of conversion.

My concern is that we have used baptism to stand for this whole process for so long and we use it so often without further discussion that many among us seem to have come to believe that "getting baptized" is all there is to becoming a Christian. Far too often people want to "get baptized" rather than convert to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. And by the way some of us talk and act, you would think that some of us believe that we are saved simply because we "got baptized." It's as if we have come to believe that (literally) the "bite" is the whole meal.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I firmly believe that baptism is essential to our salvation since it is for the forgiveness

of sin (Ac. 2:38; 22:16) and since it puts us into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-7). One is not saved until after he has been baptized (1 Pet. 3:21). But salvation involves far more than just "getting baptized." It involves a genuine conversion to Christ and being made one of His disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Being baptized into Christ is a part of that process, but any baptism that is not motivated and driven by genuine faith in Christ and a determination to put away sin from one's life is completely ineffectual (Mk. 16:16; Ac. 8:36-37). Just "getting baptized" does not make a saved disciple of Jesus any more than eating just one "bite" makes a satisfying meal.

Could it be that our careless way of speaking has contributed to some misunderstanding of the role of baptism in the process of conversion? And could it be that our misunderstanding and careless speaking has contributed to outsiders looking at us as if we have completely missed the point of salvation by grace?

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## Walking Worthy of Our Calling

The 11th Annual Men's Overnight Bible Study will be held Friday and Saturday, September 26-27 at Illinois District Camp in Wapella, Illinois. The theme for this year's study is *Walking Worthy of Our Calling: Making Changes Daily*, taken from Ephesians 4:1-3.

The idea behind the lessons is that Christians overcome sin with the power of grace. The two Friday-night lessons will focus on our salvation. Having a deep understanding and appreciation of this provides the perspective and strength for the things that will be discussed on Saturday.

This event is organized by individual Christians and is not the work of any congregation. Our desire is to help men better understand and more successfully carry out their commission as fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, teachers, preachers, elders and deacons within the environments of home, church and the world, using the inspired Word of God as our guide.

There is a modest per-person fee to defray the costs of the campsite and meals. In addition to the spiritual feast, attendees will benefit from social interaction with other men of like faith. For more information and online registration, go to [www.mensstudy.org](http://www.mensstudy.org). Registration will begin August 1.

At presstime, the list of speakers was not complete, but following is a partial list of speakers and all the topics to be presented.

### MEN'S OVERNIGHT BIBLE STUDY

"Grace as the Foundation for Change"

JEREMY DEHUT

"Grace as the Strength for Change"

STEVE BONK

"Using Sorrow to Overcome Sin"

RICK LANNING

"Using Accountability  
to Overcome Sin"

SPEAKER TO BE ANNOUNCED

"Using Radical Measures to  
Overcome Sin"

RICK LIGGIN

"Using Confession to Overcome Sin"

STEVE WOLFGANG

"Using Humility to Overcome Sin"

JEREMY JONES

"Using Gratitude to Overcome Sin"

SPEAKER TO BE ANNOUNCED

"Using a Dynamic Relationship with  
Jesus to Overcome Sin"

DAVID DIESTELKAMP

"A Call to Holiness & Hope"

SPEAKER TO BE ANNOUNCED



# Jim's Old Pickup Truck

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

The old pickup truck was white—sorta. It had been sprayed entirely with cans of paint long ago. I couldn't tell anymore if it was gloss paint or not. But at least it ran—sorta. I was given a complicated starting procedure and the sweet spot for depressing the clutch. Finding the gear pattern was somewhat of a game of hide and seek, and there was no third gear. I discovered for myself that the parking brake didn't work when it rolled into the street off of my driveway even though I left it in gear. And the handling? I'll just say it was like driving a sumo wrestler and leave it at that. But I loved that truck! I borrowed it occasionally for dirty jobs. It was a dirty-job truck. You couldn't hurt it. But I loved it even more for its service. It was in its worn condition from use, not from abuse. It could have been in perfect condition, but that would have required that it not be used, that it not live for what it had been made. It would not have served the purpose of its existence. I loved it because it could be used without reluctance—as a truck.

Jesus said, "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings" (Lk. 16:9). I understand this to mean that someday material things will all be useless and gone; therefore, we are to use our physical "stuff" in life in such a way that it will impact our eternal future.

What if we truly looked at *everything* we have as something to be used in view of our eternal destination? This means more than just not obtaining sinful things by sinful ways. It means thinking of our cars as tools to help people, our houses as a means to be hospitable, our video games as a way of getting good young people connected, our food as a way of helping someone in need, our phones as a way to encourage the discouraged, social media as a way to spiritually connect and invite, our jobs as a means of connecting and making money to serve others, etc.

What if you pick up something within arm's reach of you now and say to yourself, "God gave me this. How can I use it in service to Him and others?" We have to start thinking differently about stuff.

"Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox" (Prov. 14:4). The only way to keep a completely clean barn is to keep the oxen out, but that defeats the purpose of the barn, and there will be no harvest without an ox. Serving means that our houses and cars will show wear. Sometimes our clothing will get dirty, the screens on our phones will get cracked, and our game controllers will

get worn out. Our budgets will be strained and our pantries will be a little more empty because we are using them. Because that is why God gave them to us—not to be saved and preserved in pristine condition, but to be thoughtfully and prayerfully used and used up in view of eternity.

I fear that some of us will learn too late that trying to preserve what we have been given makes us the one-talent man of Matthew 25:4 who thought it was enough to return what he was entrusted with in good condition. "You wicked and lazy servant," was the master's response. Then Jesus warned, "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:29-30).

I hope my truck looks like Jim's truck someday—and for the same reason.

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## PAUL'S MOTHER

By STEVE FONTENOT

Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine" (Rom. 16:13). Paul is the author of this letter. Is this Paul's mother in the flesh, or in spirit (i.e., had enjoyed maternal care from her in some way)?

We know hardly anything of Paul's family except that his father was a Pharisee (Ac. 23:6). Paul was reared and learned in the Hebrew religion (Ac. 22:3; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5). Unless he was raised by other relatives, this points to his parents (or one of them if the other had passed away) being strong devotees to the strict Jewish religion

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triumphed by Pharisees. The woman in this text was a Christian and living in Rome.

If this is Paul's fleshly mother, this is the only mention of her in all his epistles, and it is but an allusion. If this is his fleshly mother and she was now a Christian, it seems all the more strange that he would make but a passing reference to her and also mention her as the mother of Rufus first.

It seems more probable (and most, if not all, commentators take this view) that he calls her his "mother" because of her motherly care expressed in some way toward Paul (cp. Mk. 10:30; Judg. 5:7).

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