



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

*Philippians 4:8*

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## *Where Will It Stop? What Will Stop It?*

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

For more than half a century, the sexual revolution has promoted freedom from biblical morality. On one hand we have been told that sexual behavior is private and that governments, churches, and others should mind their own business. On the other hand, we are daily confronted with news of people “coming out” and with intense societal pressure to approve of homosexuality. So, which is it? Is homosexual behavior none of our business, or is it everybody’s business to accept, protect, endorse, celebrate, promote, and embrace it?

Why has homosexuality gained such status? Fornication has become an archaic term, but it simply refers to any sexual union outside the context of marriage as defined by God (Heb. 13:4). Fornication comes in many forms. Securing civil rights for one form of fornication while leaving others out seems arbitrary and itself unjust. So, at what point of sexual expression will all of this demand for legitimacy stop? What will stop it?

Many churches have lost all credibility in the fornication debate because of their inconsistency in applying Scripture to practices that are clearly identified as sin. For example, some people—in their efforts to support homosexuality—have routinely called out churches for ignoring the Bible’s teaching on divorce. If Jesus’ teaching on divorce can be ignored or twisted to justify heterosexual relationships, then Jesus’ definition of a God-joined marriage being between a man and a woman (see Matt. 19:4-9) can be just as easily ignored.

When churches tolerate the impenitent heterosexual fornication of their membership, it is impossible to take seriously their opposition to homosexual activity. Hypocrisy is powerful leverage for immorality to find its way into a church. It leaves a

church without moral authority, and immorality will quickly fill that vacuum (cf. 1 Cor. 5). Where will that immorality stop, and what will stop it?

We watch as denomination after denomination succumbs to cultural and social pressures to redefine marriage and approve of homosexual unions. This shows that such organizations may be guided more by a mentality of “majority rules” than by hearts over which “God rules.” Indeed, the very organizational concept of local churches under the oversight of mother churches and/or conferences and man-made creeds is itself without biblical precedent.

While such organizations often form with the motive of clarifying and protecting truth for the purposes of unity, they actually end up promoting division. Likewise, they lend support to the perverse thinking that doctrine is the product of religious tradition or consensus rather than that which was revealed by the inspired apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ through Scripture. Thus, these denominations have their foundations laid on the shifting sand of human wisdom rather than on the rock-solid stability of God’s revealed truth and are, therefore, subject to the shifting winds of pop culture and the storms they bring (cf. Matt. 7:24-27). “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps. 127:1). If we forsake Jesus’ teaching as the rock of our lives, then where will apostasy stop, and what will stop it?

Also grievous in these moral debates is the charge by many that hatred is at the center of any opposition. This is a patently false and unfair charge that is readily illustrated. For example, if one is opposed to child abuse, that opposition is not necessarily rooted in hate. It is care and concern for the well being of the child that is at the root of opposition to child abuse. Similarly, opposition to the abortion of babies is not rooted in hate. It is love and respect for hu-

man life that motivates one to be a voice for the voiceless who are being killed. Certainly, we must beware that our passionate stand for justice and morality does not cause us to hate our enemies; but if we cannot oppose anything without being accused of hate speech, then what can be stopped, and how can it be stopped?

Likewise, opposition to homosexuality is being characterized by some as being rooted in hate. For centuries Christians have attempted to make a distinction between hating the sin versus hating the sinner. In the heat of conflict, all of us need to remind ourselves of this. The gospel message is that, though God hates sin, He loves sinners and sent His Son to save us despite our sins (e.g. Rom. 5:8). However, those bent on continuing in their sin despite God’s grace turn deaf ears to this message and this distinction. It matters little to them that people opposed to homosexuality express love for them as sinners while hating their sinful behavior. The warped conclusion of many impenitent sinners is that those who do not validate their sinful choices with acceptance and approval must, therefore, hate them.

Finally, those who have eagerly supported the homosexual agenda have not adequately answered how the arguments and rationale they have used to redefine morality, love, and marriage cannot likewise be used by prostitutes, polygamists, and pedophiles to justify their immorality. The best they can do is to act insulted by the suggestion that their chosen form of fornication is being compared to other perversions. Culturally, morally, and spiritually speaking, we are reaping what we’ve sown (Gal. 6:7,8). Where will this stop? It won’t unless we repent of all our fornications and return to the standard for marriage and sexuality revealed by the Creator in His Word.

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764  
e-mail: [adiestel@frontier.com](mailto:adiestel@frontier.com)

# Does the Combine Do Its Job?

By MASON VENUSO

**E**vangelism. Is it working? You proclaim the gospel to your relatives, to neighbors, to the poor, and to people on the street or at public venues. You pass out Bibles and tracts and utilize the internet, radio, and newspaper. There may be a bit of an adrenaline rush after a conversation or study with an unbeliever. Many in the congregation may be involved with various efforts. However, how many people are actually being saved? If your efforts at evangelism have produced few or no converts, then what are you so excited about? We may be enthused by our evangelistic ideas, our zeal, and the collective effort of the congregation, but let's not confuse efforts to share the gospel with actually bringing people to Christ.

We may be busy spreading the word and feel disappointed with the lack converts, or we may be pointing at the lack of converts resulting from the work of others as an excuse for our lack of involvement. "Is it working?" I say all this to get us to think. This is a question about function and purpose. Do we assume that success means converting people? Most people that I have spoken to about Christ have not been converted. Most people to whom the apostles, prophets, and Christ himself spoke were not converted. Success cannot be simplistically measured by how many are converted.

The gospel accomplishes what it is meant to accomplish every single time. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-12).

What would the word of the Lord ac-



complish? It is true that it would ultimately renew Israel and give them peace (Isa. 55:12); but before this idyllic picture would become a reality, the majority of Israel would continue to reject the message that Isaiah proclaimed. Consider what the word of the Lord was accomplishing in Isaiah's day. "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive'" (Isa. 6:9). In this case, it was even meant by the Lord to harden its hearers.

In Luke 3, John told his audience that one mightier than he would immerse them in the Holy Spirit and fire. Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, and Ezekiel all proclaimed the promise that the Lord would one day pour out his Spirit on his people (see Isa. 44:1-5). The prophets also speak about the Lord pouring out the fire of his wrath (see Ezk. 21:31). John described what the Lord was doing by saying, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Lk. 3:17). In one act, the winnowing fork separated wheat from chaff.

Since most of us don't see people using winnowing forks on a regular basis, consider the many combines that have been harvesting this season. Before the combine shows up, you've got a field full of crops—plants that have grown because of a lot of sweat, water, and sunshine. The farmer is

eagerly anticipating harvest time. But after the combine goes through, most of the stuff in the field is tossed aside! Only a relatively small portion of each plant is salvaged—the grain. How silly it would be to take a combine to the dump simply because it doesn't change the entire plant to grain. Its job is to separate the grain from the chaff.

The same goes for the message of God and the Spirit of God. The Lord's word accomplishes what he sends it to accomplish. For those who respond in faith, the immersion is of Spirit. For those who reject the Lord, the immersion is of fire. Though most reject the Spirit of God, it is not a failure. The Spirit is doing its job. To suggest that success is measured by how many people are converted would imply that God is weak.

The purpose and function of our proclaiming Christ is just that—to get the message out. The question "Is it working?" may still be asked. It can be a question of how well we are getting the word out or a question of *if* we are getting the word out. This is not to make us feel comfortable with work we are not doing. It is to point out that some of our greatest fears—our own inadequacy and being rejected by others—are no excuse for our failure to proclaim the Kingdom of God. The most surefire way to fail to bring people to Christ is to opt out of telling them about him. We must not excuse ourselves of the duty to proclaim Christ by pointing at our own inadequacies or the weaknesses of various methods of getting the word out.

On the whole, the message of Christ crucified has been and will be rejected. It is, after all, a declaration that we have all rejected the Lord. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:6-7).

2030 N. 49th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53208  
e-mail: mason.venus@gmail.com

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Editor AL DIESTELKAMP  
260 N. Aspen Drive  
Cortland, IL 60112  
(815) 756-9840

E-mail aldiestel@gmail.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com





# Reason for Concern

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

The outbreak of the Ebola hemorrhagic fever virus in West Africa grabbed our attention when some American healthcare workers contracted it and were brought to the U.S. Waves of concern were expressed among people and the media over bringing Ebola here. The CDC has assured everyone that the chance of infecting others is slim and there is basically no chance of an uncontrolled outbreak like we see in West Africa. However, there is still reason for concern.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

GALATIANS 6:10

## • “AS WE HAVE OPPORTUNITY”

While it is true that there are many diseases and disasters in the world causing untold suffering, Christians don't just sit idly by. We don't thank God that it isn't here and then turn a blind eye to the needs of others. We look for opportunities to help. We create opportunities to help. We show our

concern and care by taking advantage of opportunities to do good.

## • “LET US DO GOOD”

The needs of our suffering world can be overwhelming at times. When we hear of suffering, we need to ask ourselves what good thing we can do. Sometimes there will be little, if anything, we can do to end physical suffering; but we can always pray. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6).

I have spoken to brethren in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria. Their constant request is for our prayers that this crisis will end soon and loss of life will be minimal. We need to show in our prayers that we remain concerned about the great suffering that people in places like West Africa are experiencing. Praying is something good we can always do.

## • “TO ALL”

We may be tempted not to be sympathetic—not be concerned. Some blame the spread of Ebola on ignorance or lack of cooperation with health workers. We need to remember that deep poverty has contributed to the spread of Ebola (and other diseases). Overcrowded homes, shared meals, no central water or sewage systems, low literacy rate, lack of sanitation, poor communication systems, lack of trustworthy

medical care, and a host of other poverty-related issues have created a perfect environment for this disease to spread. Fragile healthcare systems have collapsed, often with workers initially fleeing when contagious patients arrived and no protection or training was available for the workers. We need to be compassionate toward those who face gruesome and lonely deaths without human contact. The Scriptures have a lot to say about compassion and concern for the poor, and this crisis is the very picture of poverty. Remember, thousands are sick and dying without hope in Christ.

## • “ESPECIALLY TO THOSE WHO

### ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

There are many Christians in West Africa whose lives are at risk. Although they take prescribed precautions, they continue to assemble, evangelize, and encourage each other when possible. Although they have seen people forcibly taken away by men in hazmat suits never to be seen again, they continue to trust God, constantly affirming, “God is in control.” They report a greater spiritual interest in some due to fear and therefore more opportunities to spread the hope of life in Christ. They can't leave. They don't hide. They can inspire us as they see opportunity to “do good” even in a crisis. They solicit our prayers. They need our prayers.

940 N. Elmwood Dr., Aurora, Illinois 60506  
e-mail: [davdiestel@yahoo.com](mailto:davdiestel@yahoo.com)

## IN DEFENSE OF TOPICAL PREACHING

By AL DIESTELKAMP

In touting the superiority of expository preaching, some have been openly critical of topical preaching. Occasionally an “expositor” will even dare to belittle the topical approach by calling it “proof-text preaching.”

There is great value in expository preaching wherein you “expose” the meaning within the immediate context. It appears that Philip used this method when teaching the Ethiopian about Jesus (Ac. 8:35). However, the use of this approach must not eliminate preaching which explores a topic within the context of the *entire* word of God (i.e., gathering all that is revealed about the particular topic).

Both methods of preaching can be used by preachers to promote either truth or error. When preaching topically, care is needed to avoid misusing the text. Similar caution is needed by the expositor to avoid surmising what is meant.

There is danger in the abandonment of topical preaching. For

some, the exclusive use of expository preaching has made it convenient to avoid making specific applications. Some even pride themselves in just preaching the principle and expecting their listeners to make their own applications. Quite frankly, that's not preaching—that's just reading.

Critics of topical preaching need to show us just how to teach against any number of false doctrines and unscriptural practices without use of such preaching. In fact, I have to wonder if this is the very reason *some* are turned off by topical preaching.

Perhaps what some ignore is that when a book of the Bible is taught in a class setting, there is ample opportunity to employ the expository method of teaching.

Let me be perfectly clear. I am not opposing expository preaching. To borrow a phrase from the Lord, “This you ought to do without leaving the other undone” (Matt. 23:23). Lest anyone is critical of my use of Jesus' words, keep in mind that even He occasionally resorted to what some call “proof-texting” (Matt. 9:13; Mk. 11:17, etc.).



# 'Just As the Father Told Me'

By RICK LIGGIN

**H**ow careful do you think we need to be as we handle the Word of God and try to teach it to others? The apostle Peter once warned: "Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). In other words, if we are going to speak for God, then we had better be sure we are saying only what God has spoken! We cannot make up our own doctrines and try to pass them off as the teachings of God! We are only allowed to speak that which God has uttered or spoken or revealed in His Word. To misrepresent God through an inaccurate handling of His Word could put our own souls, and the souls of those we are trying to teach, in serious jeopardy.

## Taking a Lesson from Jesus

Now you may think that we have overstated the case, but please notice the care that Jesus gave to accurately presenting the message He received from the Father:

"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me" (Jn. 12:48-50).

In this text, Jesus first identifies the standard by which we ultimately will be judged: it will be by "the word" that Jesus

"spoke" (12:48). And Jesus had a lot to say—much of which He said while yet on earth but most of which He spoke from heaven though His inspired apostles and prophets after his ascension (Jn. 15:25-26; 16:12-13; Eph. 5:1-5). All of this, recorded for us in the New Testament, constitutes the word that Jesus spoke...the standard by which we will be judged. We will not be judged by the opinions of men or the doctrines of men but by the word that Jesus spoke. Our lives must conform to His word or else we will find ourselves in a difficult situation when that judgment day comes!

But notice also that the word Jesus spoke did not originate with Him. He did not speak on His "own initiative" or invent His own message. Instead, Jesus spoke *only* what He received from His Father: the Father who sent Him gave Him "a commandment as to what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49). If Jesus didn't originate His own message, then we shouldn't either!

The reason Jesus was so careful to speak only what His Father told Him to say is because He knew something about His Father's commandment! He knew that

His Father's commandment or instruction "is eternal life" (Jn. 12:50). He knew that His Father's message had the power to provide eternal life to those who followed it! Eternal life hung in the balance! Get it right, and man can have eternal life. Get it wrong, and man would be lost eternally. "Therefore"—since eternal life hung in the balance—"therefore," Jesus said He spoke "just as the Father has told Me" (12:50). No alterations!

## The Implication and Application

If Jesus was careful to accurately relate God's message to us "just as the Father told" Him, then it seems to me that the implications are obvious and clear: 1) We better take just as much care in relating the Word of God to men. We better not alter it or change it (1 Pet. 4:11); and 2) We better be just as careful in keeping His Word—we better do *just as the Father told Him*, without alterations (Matt. 7:21).

If Jesus was that careful, shouldn't we be that careful, too? Surely we should!

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

## In Memory



**CHARLENE FERRIS, 90**, died September 6, 2014. She and her husband Ray Ferris were married 67 years. After working briefly in Richmond, Virginia, Ray and Charlene moved to Wisconsin where they worked with local churches in Racine and Kenosha and later with churches in Elgin, Rockford, Lockport, and Normal, Illinois. For reasons of health in 2010 they relocated to Louisville, Kentucky, where they could be aided by their daughter. As a part of our extended physical family, as well as our spiritual family, Charlene will be missed, but we are comforted that she is now with the Lord. Besides her husband, she is survived by two daughters, Marilyn Ferris and Donna Manz, a son Jim Ferris, seven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

## Voluntary Partners

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# THINK

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