



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

January-February-March, 2024 • Volume 55, No. 1

DECONSTRUCTION

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

DECONSTRUCTION is likely something you have heard of; but perhaps you are not certain you understand what is meant by it. Join the club! Originally, it was the idea of literally taking something apart, but in more modern times it has been used philosophically to refer to a process of challenging assumptions about what is true or real.

In its more literal application, we can see that deconstruction could be important. In order to build something solid where something inferior already exists, it first requires some tearing down. The same could also be true of ideas or beliefs or practices. Jesus was involved in a kind of deconstruction when He challenged the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees of His day.

Whatever someone might mean by the term *deconstruction*, it is important to consider one's motives. For some, deconstruction is a prideful pastime that glories in casting doubt upon anything cherished or otherwise accepted. It can also be a form of rebellion that delights in something akin to intellectual arson. It might be done for no other reason than to watch something burn down. Some deconstructionists are nothing more than spiritual pyromaniacs who have nothing of substance to offer after the smoke clears.

Deconstruction might be motivated by accurate knowledge but still exercised without love. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies (1 Cor. 8:1). When we know something that others don't, there is an inclination to want to share it with others. This can be good if it is for the purpose of improving and strengthening others. However, too often, it is more about the flexing of intellectual muscle with little or no regard for the welfare of those who are deemed ignorant.

However, Jesus' deconstruction was not

of these varieties. Certainly, there were concepts and traditions in Jesus' day which needed to be taken apart; but the purpose of tearing them down was to reconstruct something sound.

Good deconstruction is not indiscriminate. It separates the wheat from the weeds rather than burning the entire field (cf. Mt. 13:30). Deconstruction is not an end. It is a means to a better structure of understanding.

Granted, the need for deconstruction is not always so evident to those who treasure their traditions or the status quo. When Jesus came into this world, He was opposed by those whose messianic expectations He did not meet. For example, it seems that some were charging Jesus with seeking "to destroy the Law or the Prophets" because He challenged what they had "heard that it was said to those of old" (Mt. 5:17-48). Jesus clarified that He "did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

Jesus' deconstruction of the misconceptions and misapplications of the Law of Moses did not constitute a trashing of the Law. Indeed, after Jesus was killed for teaching these things, He defeated death and arose to remind His disciples of what He had taught them previously. "That all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Lk. 24:44).

Nevertheless, in pointing to Himself as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus *did* render the Sinai covenant obsolete (cf. Heb. 8:7-13). Undoubtedly, from the perspective of most Jews, this was effectively destructive. Yet this deconstruction was essential if Jesus was going to serve as a high priest (cf. Heb. 2:14-3:1; 4:14-5:11; 7:1-28) Who would reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to their Creator and to one another in one body.

The Jewish temple in Jerusalem made with hands *was* literally destroyed (as Jesus

said it would be - Mt. 24), and in a figurative sense "heaven and earth" *did* pass away (from a Jewish perspective). The middle wall of division *was* broken down. The law of commandments that created such enmity *was* abolished in Jesus' crucifixion (Eph 2:14,15).

Yet, this was not mere deconstruction on Jesus' part. It was the fulfillment of an eternal plan "to create in Himself one new man ... that He might reconcile [Jew and Gentile] to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (vv 15,16). Now we are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (vv 20-22).

None of this could have happened without some kind of deconstruction. Certainly, we must beware of those who seek to destroy what is true and righteous. Yet, we must also humbly acknowledge that through the years many things have been constructed by men which (through some form of deconstruction) have been shown not to be of God. Those with such knowledge need to deconstruct in love.

Conversely, we may grow weary of having our own beliefs challenged and our assumptions questioned. Yet, unless we want to repeat the failures of the generations of the past, we must "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thes. 5:21) and "let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Rom. 12:9). Let us be a noble people whose ears and hearts are open and will compare what we hear with the Scriptures (cf. Ac. 17:11). Let us be prepared to deconstruct our ideas and traditions so our lives can be reconstructed according to the will of God.

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Using Our God-Given Abilities

By BRET MILLER

IN MATTHEW 24, Jesus is asked about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus then spoke for a long time of many different subjects, answering what the kingdom of heaven will be like in the end. One of those descriptions involved one master and three servants. In the parable of the talents, the master gave each servant a certain amount of money according to his ability. To one the master gave five talents, to another two, and to another one talent. There is some speculation over the value of this particular form of currency. From what I have briefly researched, one talent of silver could be worth nearly twenty years of income. Whatever the case, the amount of money with which the master entrusts each servant is quite remarkable, especially considering the fact that the master then ups and leaves for a long time. If you know the story, you know that the five-talent and two-talent servants both got to work to make the money grow, whereas the one-talent servant just hid his in the ground for safekeeping. The text says that each was given talents according to his ability, so the number of talents is representative of each slave's ability.

Eventually, the master returns and he sees that the five-talent and two-talent servants have both doubled the money given to them. The master rewards them both equally, saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a few things, but I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the joy of your master." Meanwhile the one-talent man is probably wondering how he is going to pass this assignment. He has done nothing except hide his talent in the ground, and the master tells him that he is wicked and lazy for it. The one-talent man is thrown by the master outside into the darkness.

Do the talents just represent ability? If so, is our application really just to make ourselves more talented? Can the talents represent souls or perhaps good deeds? However we interpret the meaning behind the talents, whether it be the ones God gives or what we produce, I think we can safely say that God gives us talent and we are to use that talent for good. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells us not to hide our light but to let it shine to bring glory to our Father in heaven. What are we doing with what God gives us?

Why does the one-talent man hide his money? The man claims he did it out of fear. The master calls him wicked and lazy. Is the master God? If so, does God gather where he does not sow or scatter? Rather, the wicked and lazy servant had no

"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"

MATTHEW 25:29

relationship with his master to know that he is a good master. The servant claims that the master was too difficult, that he was a hard man, and that he feared him. But I think the master calls him out on it and basically says, "Oh, so I'm a hard man? Well, if that is the case, you would have at least done the bare minimum to please me" (Mt. 25:26-27 NIBMV- Not Inspired Bret Miller Version). To go along with this point, as the reader, who do you think we are supposed to trust? The unfaithful man or the master who gives so generously? Verses 28-29 have always bothered me. I think God taking from someone who doesn't have much and giving it to someone who already has plenty seems a bit backward. So how are we to understand what the master is saying here? I think the main message is that great faithfulness yields great reward. And I have peace of mind knowing that God is a perfect judge.

Applications:

- You can't change what you start with, but you can change what you end with. I teach a leadership class for high school students, and I am handed a curriculum to teach. For a couple of weeks, we talked about the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The idea being that you are more successful if—when you face challenges and fail—you keep trying and change your mindset to say, "I can't do this yet." This brings some good results and there's data to back it up. I think it's a good mindset to a certain extent. At the risk of sounding like I have a fixed mindset, I can confidently say, "I am not good enough to play in the NBA." Adding "yet" to that statement does absolutely no good. I have not been given the talents to do so. This is not an excuse, this is reality. In life, we've been given talents, but we have ceilings in certain areas. If the one-talent man works just as hard as the five-talent man, he will never catch up. I'm not saying that to discourage anyone but to help us understand the reality of the situation. We all have different abilities/gifts given by God and they're all important.

- To view everyone as having equal talents/abilities/gifts is inaccurate and, I think, detrimental to knowing how we can view and help other people. You may be a two-talent or a five-talent individual. Encourage the one-talent. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says to "encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone."
- Don't think because you're doing the work of a one-talent man that you're living up to your potential. We're not working against each other, we're working for the master. Stop comparing yourself to other talents and serve the master.
- At times the world says it is shameful to be submissive to or to serve other people. But the slaves served the master. We are to be slaves of righteousness, not sin. Don't be afraid to call yourself a bond-servant of God.
- Many people might see the one-talent man as justified because he was given something and gave the exact same thing back. This is typical of the "I'm ok you're ok, don't bother me if I'm doing nothing. Let me live my life my way," mentality. This is not acceptable in the kingdom of heaven.
- Both the five-talent and two-talent man did not procrastinate in doing the master's (God's) work. When God speaks, the faithful obey immediately. You don't know when Jesus is coming back, so get to work.
- Don't be like the one-talent man and re-work in your mind the nature of God to fit your liking or to use as an excuse for apathy.
- When we consider the value of a talent, even the one-talent man still received a lot of money/talent. You're capable of quite a bit with what God gives you.
- Too often, we compare ourselves to other people with jealousy in our hearts instead of appreciating just how much we've been given.
- I see the grace of God by entrusting so much to people who are equivalent to slaves. Our status is completely different in comparison to God, but he expects us to be faithful.
- Being "faithful over a little" (when "a little" is at least a hundred years of income for the five-talent man) doesn't seem like "a little," but it illustrates how much God give to us as *our* reward. How great that reward must be!

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The Call to Extremes

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

THROUGHOUT THE AGES God has always challenged the people who would come near to Him to extraordinary circumstances. He has never been content with the usual, the moderate, the ordinary. His commands and His promises have usually been quite extreme indeed.

The command to Adam and Eve was extreme, especially when it is realized that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good to look upon and that all other fruit was acceptable. Why exclude that one tree alone? The requirement of Noah was certainly an extreme one, especially when we realize that he could have no conception of such flooding as it was foretold, and that he could also not possibly visualize the great structure he was to erect. The commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son was extraordinary, especially when we remember that this very son was the only son of Abraham and Sarah, that he was the son of their old age, and that he was the subject of promises for future generations, all of which depended, not upon his early death, but upon his life.

The extraordinary results of certain human action—results that were of obvious divine origin—were also significant. Uzah's immediate death because of his disobedience, Naaman's immediate healing because of his obedience, and the instant punishment upon Nadab and Abihu all demonstrate the unconventional nature of God's action—the extreme nature of His promises and His threats.

It is safe to say right here that God is never satisfied with the ordinary. In the following five ways at least, we see the nature of God's demands that our religion be in the extreme—that it is to be extraordinary religion:

1. We must base our hope on such extremely unworldly things such as the virgin birth, the resurrection of the dead, the cleansing power of the blood of the cross, the precious gift of salvation by grace without human merit, the requirement that we walk by faith and not by sight, and the hope of the ultimate reward of a non-earthly, non-physical home in heaven.

2. We must obey such apparently unreasonable commands without asking "Why?" Anyone who can see through a barrel with both ends knocked out knows there is no power in water to wash away guilt in the soul; but God has chosen to make water baptism a rigid condition of pardon by His grace. The command to repent may be quite reasonable, for we can see merit in such human action that leads to reformation; but the command to be baptized

seems extreme to many since it involves no human merit.

3. God demands that His followers give up so much. Jesus taught that if our eye offends us, "pluck it out." He taught that if one finds a real treasure (salvation), he will "sell all he has" to secure it. And He taught that if one doesn't love God more than relatives, he can't please God.

4. Furthermore, we must follow Christ so very closely—extremely closely. If we put our hand to the plow and look back, we are not even fit for His kingdom. In other words, He doesn't want followers who wish they had stayed in the world or who begrudge the sacrifices they make as His disciples. Those who follow Christ reluctantly might just as well not follow Him at

all. Those who run the race lazily and those who fight the good fight carelessly don't measure up to the extraordinary discipline God demands.

5. Even with regard to the service we render, God requires extremes. Our worship must not be in formality, ceremony, and ritual, but in spirit and in truth. Our benevolence must not be simply in bestowing love upon those who love us and upon others who are altogether lovable, but it must be in extending real love to our enemies, to the unworthy, to those who are all together unlovely and even quite unlovable.

God has called us to extremes. There is nothing mediocre or commonplace in the things that separate God's very own people from the people of the world. His commands are explicit and exacting. His promises are superlative—supreme in excellence.

This article was first published in THINK, Vol. 4, No. 6, September, 1973

Jesus: Born to Die

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

DURING THE RECENT holiday season I took note of a few posts on social media from brethren who, while not trying to defend December 25 as the actual birthday of Jesus, are heartened that—at least for a brief time—more people are focused on Jesus, possibly leading to an opportunity for us to get them to consider the whole gospel of Jesus. While such opportunities may be available, we must be careful to not endorse untruth.

Then there are a few who take it a step further, suggesting that there is no harm in arbitrarily choosing a date on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The accounts of Jesus' birth by Matthew and Luke provide ample reason for us to find joy in that blessed event anytime but stop short of inventing a "holy day" for such a purpose.

It is an inescapable fact that the inspired scriptures from Acts through Revelation make only two explicit references to the birth of Christ. The apostle Paul refers to Jesus' birth being "of the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3), and to His being "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Also absent from the history and letters to the churches are instructions or any examples of the disciples (who were guided by the apostles of Christ) placing special emphasis on the birth of the Savior.

Perhaps the most significant fact is that there is no biblical indication that Jesus desires that the day of His birth be celebrated as a holy day. What other events in Jesus' life that men have set apart as religious holy days are worthy of our imitation? There's the *Feast of Transfiguration* on August 8;

Epiphany (also known as *Three Kings Day*) on January 6; *The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus* on the Sunday following Epiphany, and many more.

To invent ways to worship and honor Christ other than ways authorized in the Bible reminds me of the time when King David had it in his heart to build a house for the LORD (1 Ki. 8:17). Although David's heartfelt desire was commendable (v.18), his plan was not God-authorized. God asked, "Have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" (2 Sam. 7:7).

What Jesus desires is that we remember and proclaim His death (1 Cor. 11:23-26). *Jesus was born to die!* Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give accounts of at least three different occasions when Jesus spoke of His upcoming death: following the feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 16:21-23; Mk. 8:31-32; Lk. 9:21-22); after His transfiguration (Matt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45); and as He and His disciples were on their way to observe the Passover (Matt. 20:17-19; Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34). John's gospel adds other situations in which Jesus alluded to His upcoming death in more subtle ways (Jn. 12:7-8; 13:33; 14:25).

I have no interest in judging one who chooses to "esteem one day above another," even if he "observes it to the Lord" (Rom. 14:5-6); but I do think that he should be careful not to validate speculative elaborations of biblical events or perpetuate man-made traditions as if they are divinely ordained holy days.

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Printing, folding, tabbing	\$ 302.00
Address certification, etc.	160.00
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Bundle, return postage & supplies	51.72
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 855.96
Funds available for past issue	1,162.46
Surplus	\$ 306.50

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TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 675.00
Surplus from past issue	306.50
Funds available for this issue	\$ 981.50

As we begin this 55th year of publication, we want to thank all of our Voluntary Partners who have made this publication possible by donating toward our costs. On January 21st, postage rates are due to rise by 2%; but at the current postage rate, this issue will cost approximately \$860 which should leave a balance of about \$120 toward the next issue.

"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good"
Psalms 135:3

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Philippians 4:8

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Published quarterly by the Diestelkamp family in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice.
Distributed free as ability permits.

260 N. Aspen Drive
Cortland, IL 60112

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BODY-SHAMING JESUS

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

YOUR BODY IS IMPERFECT, flawed, scarred, ugly, too ____ (something inadequate) and, therefore so are you! This is body-shaming: the act of humiliating someone because of some aspect of his/her body. Most people accept that body-shaming is harmful and needs to stop, but it still happens a lot to Jesus without apology.

Unbelievers

The prophecy in Isaiah 53:3-5 says that Jesus would be "despised and rejected by men" and is still true today. Jesus, the Head of the body (Co 1:18), is shamed as His name, that is above all names (Ph 2:9), is used as a mindless interjection and curse. Everything about Him is "despised and rejected by men"—His historicity, His teaching, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His reign, His authority, and His return. He is shamed and blasphemed without hesitation.

Jesus warned that if He is "despised and rejected by men" (hated and persecuted – Jn 15:18-25), His followers (His body) will be, too. How does the body endure shaming? It knows, "The wise shall inherit glory, but

shame shall be the legacy of fools" (Pr 3:35). Unbelievers, "whose glory is their shame—who set their mind on earthly things" (Ph 3:19), shame Christ and His body but will inherit shame themselves. Those who are spiritually wise will inherit glory "when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe..." (2 Th 1:10). His body rejoices that it is "worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Ac 5:41) knowing that, in the end, "whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" (Ro 9:33).

Believers

Believers know Jesus as "the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (He 1:3). Believers know that they "were called in one body" (Co 3:15); and yet, some believers body-shame Jesus.

Members of the body know that their mission is the "edifying of the body of Christ" (Ep 4:12), but some are often tempted to tear it down and shame it. It begins by members not respecting and "not holding fast to the Head..." (Co

1:19). Actions that ignore, and degrade the authority and direction of the Head (Jesus) also dishonor, disrespect, and shame Him.

Tolerating immorality shames the body of Christ and gives cause for blaspheming Him (1 Co 5:1-8; 1 Ti 6:1; Ti 2:5). False teaching brings blasphemy to the way of truth (2 Pe 2:1-3). The words and actions of members of the body of Christ must not invite shaming of Christ and His body.

Believers are often tempted to shame other body members with harsh words, condemnation, disunity, refusal to forgive, lack of love, selfishness, prejudice, devaluing various gifts and positions in the body, dishonoring poor brothers and sisters, etc. If believers aren't treating other believers as those for whom Christ died, they are both shaming their brothers and shaming Christ and His grace.

Believers are "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (He 12:2). Jesus despised and bore the shame of the cross. It's past time for body-shaming Jesus to stop.

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