

ERSATZ

By SCOTT MILLER

A FEW YEARS AGO, my wife Suzy and I were with some friends on our annual bike trip. The weather did not cooperate, so we ended up playing some games. In one of those games, a word came up with which I was not familiar, but now I will never forget: *ersatz*. According to dictionary.com, it means “serving as a substitute; synthetic; artificial”. The game we were playing defined it as “a bad substitute for something.”

On that trip, when a good friend (who shall remain nameless) suggested we have donuts for lunch, I felt that the term *ersatz* was quite apt. Seriously though, how many people 1) settle for a bad substitute over the genuine article; 2) spend their whole lives pursuing something that pales in comparison to that of true value; 3) give up so much that they can never get back to fulfill a desire or for a moment of pleasure?

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (Heb. 12:15-17).

I believe *ersatz* applies to our spiritual pursuits as well. How many “religious” people are accepting a poor substitute for the true gospel? They seek something that appeases their desires rather than submit their desires to God and His will.

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tim. 4:3).

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-9 ESV).

May *ersatz* never be an apt description of our spiritual walk.

hawkifanz22@gmail.com

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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SCRIPTURALLY SPEAKING:

SAINT & SANCTIFY

By NOAH DIESTELKAMP

THE WORDS “SAINT” and “sanctify,” are related to one another but their meanings are not always clearly understood. *Sanctify* is an uncommon word outside of religious discussions, so we do not have an everyday or intuitive understanding of it. *Saint*, on the other hand, is a far more familiar word, but it bears an excess of cultural connotation which obscures its scriptural use and meaning.

Both words find their root in the Latin word *sanctus*, which simply means “holy.” Therefore, when we read the words “saint” and “sanctify” in our Bibles, we usually could just as accurately substitute some form of “holy.” Holiness describes something which is separate from common things or is “set apart.” We can understand holiness as being set apart from sin and wickedness, or we can understand it as being set apart for God’s special purposes.

With this perspective, “saint” and “sanctify” become more straightforward. A saint is a person who is made holy not through some personal achievement but by being set apart from sin by God for his purposes. This meaning is clearly seen in how the word is used in New Testament writing. People who belong to God are called saints, such as in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2). Being saints describes both what we are (God’s people) and what we are called to (a life of holiness).

To sanctify, therefore, is to make holy. The New Testament authors use this concept in a multiple ways. In some contexts, “sanctification” refers to something that has happened to all Christians in the past: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified...by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor.

6:11). “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). In this sense, sanctification is something we experienced when we were cleansed by the blood of Christ through baptism—we were made holy. But the same authors also describe sanctification as an ongoing process in which we participate! Just a few verses later in Hebrews 10, the author refers to “those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14), and Paul urges the Thessalonian saints to live out his teaching because God’s will was their sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3). He urges these Christians to live a certain way because God had called them “in holiness,” and living unholy lives disregards God (v.7-8)!

In sanctification, we find a harmonization of two beautiful truths. On the one hand, the blood of Jesus and the power of the Spirit have already sanctified us. This was done to us in the past. On the other hand, God’s will is that we continue to be sanctified, submitting the way we live to emulate and imitate God’s holiness. This is something in which we participate in the present. We are holy because God has set us apart as “a holy nation...for his own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9f), but we all can attest to the fact that becoming a Christian doesn’t make our living holy overnight. In the words of Peter, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:14-15). Through the blood of Christ, we are saints, able to be confident and secure in the sanctification found therein. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, and through the working of God’s Word, we are being sanctified, transformed from the inside-out. Having thus been set apart from sin for the work of God, we share the same calling that all saints before us have answered – to live holy lives unto God’s glory (1 Pet. 2:12). Let us answer this call with readiness!

nadiestel@gmail.com

Strong-Willed Parents

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

THE FIFTH of the Ten Commandments is “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex. 20:12; cf. Dt. 5:16). It is interesting that this positive command is connected to the land promise that God had given to their patriarchs. If they wanted God’s future blessing, then they had to honor their parents.

It was the duty of parents not only to have God’s commands in their own hearts but to “teach them diligently to [their] children” (Dt. 6:6-9). This is crucial for the faithfulness of the next generation. Yet, the practical application of the fifth commandment was not only for young children but for children who had grown up and begun families of their own. One does not outgrow the command to honor father and mother.

This truth is seen in Jesus’ citation of this command to honor father and mother in His reprimand of the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocritical devotion to their traditions (Mt. 15:1-7). Specifically, Jesus was incensed that adult children were imagining loopholes in the Law in order to excuse themselves from adequately caring for their parents. They were more devoted to their temple traditions than they were to what God had clearly commanded.

Undoubtedly, Paul alludes to this obligation to honor parents when he instructs Timothy to “not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father” and “the older women as mothers” (1 Tim. 5:1,2). Then Paul says, “Honor widows who are really widows” and clarifies that “if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God” (vv 3,4). Paul makes clear that this is an obligation when he says in this same context, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (v 8).

Again, Paul was not writing only to dependent children when he wrote, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). To support this, Paul cites the fifth commandment and identifies it as “the first commandment with promise” (i.e. “that it might be well with you and you may live long on the earth” - vv 2,3). Yes, this should be taught to children from their infancy, but Paul was writing to “saints who are...faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1) The obligation to honor and obey one’s parents does not end at adulthood.

I anticipate that some will bristle at the idea that honoring father and mother

includes obeying them even in adulthood. Indeed, when children are “coming of age” they often assert their “rights” as individuals and challenge parental authority. It can be a very stressful time especially if the parents have not trained and exemplified the fifth commandment in the home toward grandparents and great-grandparents.

Paul instructs fathers to bring their children up “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (6:4), and this includes teaching them to honor and obey father and mother and to understand the concepts of respect and submission. The goal of Paul’s instruction is to raise children who will have a practical understanding of what it means to submit to Jesus as Lord when they become adults. My grandfather liked to say that the family [as designed and intended by God] is the vestibule of heaven.

I have made all of these observations to lay a foundation for challenging parents to be careful in how they use their God-given authority especially as their children mature into adults. These are crucial days that require parents to have the knowledge and wisdom of God’s Word and the manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit. Ideally, parents are the spiritually-mature ones relative to their children. Therefore, parents must be ready to extend grace just as God does toward all of us.

Notice that Paul explicitly tells fathers not to “provoke your children to wrath” (v 4). In Colossians he writes similarly, “do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col. 3:21). There are a number of possible applications we could make of these moderating words, but they are there to remind us of our goal and to balance and temper the exercise of our parental authority.

First, let’s note what this does *not* mean. If your child feels sad or mad as a result of your discipline (i.e. teaching, correction, and/or punishment), it does not mean that you have violated this admonition. “No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous” (Heb. 12:11); and the more immature the child is, the more grievous he will view even good discipline. If a parent gives up on discipline simply because a child cries or throws a fit, then the child will be “without chastening” like those without parents (v 8). Press on in faith because holy and consistent discipline eventually “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (v 11).

What Paul *is* concerned about is the failure to discipline at all and/or the failure to discipline in love. Parents need to remember what Jesus said to His disciples

about the exercise of authority: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...yet it shall not be so among you” (Mt. 20:25,26). Godly parents are less concerned about their position of authority and more concerned about serving their children’s spiritual and developmental needs. Therefore, if we have trained our children in God’s ways, we do not need to lord it over our maturing children as we did when they were two years old.

When I was but a youth, there was a book in my parents’ home entitled *The Strong-Willed Child* (by the late Dr. James Dobson). I never considered the possibility that my parents purchased and displayed that book with *me* in mind, and, of course, I never read it. It was a parenting book, and I was an immature child. However, it is not only children who are strong willed. There are also strong-willed parents who need to learn how not to frustrate their maturing children by lording their parental authority over them.

Good parenting prepares children to make their own decisions in the fear of the Lord. While we never stop being parents and our children never outgrow honoring us and obeying us as their parents, it does not reflect well on our parenting if we try to micro-manage our mature children’s lives and demand they submit to our will in matters of judgment. Certainly, our role is still to hold them accountable to God’s will as we all need this, whether it be from our parents, the elders of the church, or a brother or sister in Christ.

I am saddened when I learn of Christian parents and their believing adult children who are estranged from one another because of a failure to respect one another. Whether it be the failure of a child to honor father and mother or the ostensibly more mature but strong-willed parents frustrating and provoking their children to wrath, repentance and reconciliation should be desired and pursued. Indeed, whichever parties imagine themselves the more spiritually mature should be the ones to initiate reconciliatory efforts (cf. Mt. 5:21-26; Gal. 6:1; Js. 5:19,20) and, if these fail, to get others involved (cf. Mt. 18:15-17).

Do you know of circumstances where strong-willed personalities need to be challenged to extend grace to one another? I urge you to help these people who labor with you in the gospel to be of the same mind (Php. 4:2,3). Initiating reconciliation may be as simple as sharing these thoughts with the estranged family members in the hopes that some will take a look in the mirror of God’s Word and resolve to act (Js. 1:21-27).

andydiestelkamp@gmail.com

Spiritual Tipping Points

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

THERE ARE MOMENTS that reach such intensity that all which is held sacred and true may be ignored and a threshold crossed to do unthinkable actions. These are called tipping points. They happen in everyday life, but they also happen in one's spiritual life.

Let me tell you about a man who was supposed to stand for law and order. When challenged publicly to break the law and support injustice, he refused. He tried to reason with the accusers and rebuffed them multiple times with innocent verdicts. He even appealed to a tradition, but it didn't solve the problem. Even after his wife warned him not to, he gave in. This man was Pontus Pilate, and his tipping point was politics: "From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.' When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out..." and soon "delivered Him to them to be crucified" (Jn 19:12-16).

Law, justice, reasoning, innocent rulings, tradition, and a spouse weren't enough to hold Pilate to do what he knew to be the right thing. He fought it until something was at risk that he valued more than law, justice, reasoning, his findings, tradition, and his wife's input. This isn't a case of a blind or ignorant decision. Pilate knew his decision to hand Jesus over violated law, justice, reason, judgment, tradition, and his wife's advice. But politics and job security were his tipping point. The chilling part of this is that all of us probably have a spiritual tipping point too.

MANAGING OUR TIPPING POINTS

I don't have one. We are tempted to deny our tipping points. Wicked men like Pilate are not the only ones who have tipping points. Peter didn't think he would turn his back on what he knew to be true and deny the Lord: "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (Matt 26:35). The fact that we don't see our tipping points is what makes them so easy to sneak up on us. The fact that we deny them is what makes them so dangerous. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Imagining the unimaginable. Pilate initially stood for the law and pronounced Jesus' innocence many times—"I find no fault in this Man" (Lk 23:4) and "...nothing deserving of death has been done by Him" (Lk 23:14-15). Pilate is strong until he's not and then does the unimaginable by autho-



rizing the crucifixion of the innocent Jesus. Peter tried to imagine the worst that could happen, "If I have to die with You" (Mk 14:31), but he didn't see confessing Christ when under pressure as his tipping point. Christians may be strong until something unimaginable happens and they "...crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb 6:6).

Avoid micro-compromises. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and the false charges were due to envy (Matt 27:18), yet he offered to have Jesus beaten and released (Lk 23:16, 17). He actually did have Jesus scourged, but instead of de-escalating things, "...when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'" (Jn 19:1, 5-6). Some of these seem like innocent missteps, such as Peter sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:40-41), while others try to quantify and belittle sin. These can blind us and even cause our consciences to be "seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:2). Consciously allowing any sin to dwell in our hearts and lives compromises our reverence for God and His will and dilutes our abhorrence of evil (Rom. 12:9). Compromises are wrong and will create additional unthinkable future tipping points.

Avoid abandoning knowledge and reason in intense situations. Pilate's problem wasn't that he didn't know that the law said Jesus was innocent or that he was convinced by reason that Jesus was guilty. Peter's triple denial wasn't due to him not knowing the truth about Jesus. The problem is that things like fear and consequences can cause us to ignore what we know and accept bad reasoning (or no reasoning at all). God warns us to remain vigilant, clear minded, and thoughtful in all situations (1 Pet 5:8; Phil 4:8). If we fail to do so, we may cross our tipping point and do what we know we shouldn't.

Avoid "I can do whatever I want" thinking. Pilate thought he could do whatever he wanted. He said to Jesus, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" (Jn 19:10). Jesus reminded Pilate that he wouldn't have any power at

all against Him "unless it had been given you from above" (Jn 19:11). When Peter denied what Jesus said about His suffering and death, Jesus told him, "...You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt 16:23). Thinking we know better than God or that we are in control tips us into things that are not the will of God.

Listen to warnings. While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, "...his wife sent to him, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him'" (Matt 27:19). Pilate didn't listen. Jesus warned the disciples, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night" (Matt 26:31). Peter was certain that he wouldn't stumble, but Jesus warned him that he would deny Him three times (Matt 26:33). In the Garden, Jesus warned the disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41). They didn't listen. There is power to avoid tipping points in warnings, vigilance, and prayer.

Avoid siding with Jesus' enemies. "When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all..." and "...wanting to gratify the crowd... he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified" (Matt 27:24; Mk 15:15). Crowd sourcing and crowd pleasing is often disastrous. And sometimes just being around those who are against Jesus takes us to our tipping point. It can be like after Jesus' arrest with Peter warming himself by the fire in the courtyard of the high priest and exposing himself to his tipping point and denying Jesus. Being with the wrong people when we're vulnerable can tip us to want to please them rather than God.

Return. It appears that Pilate's tip was a one-way trip, but it doesn't have to be. Jesus said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31-32). Simon's faith failed, but it wouldn't be a total failure if he returned to Jesus. And he did! When Jesus rose from the dead, the angel told the women at the empty tomb, "...go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as He said to you" (Mk 16:7). When we stumble over our tipping points, our Lord prays that our faith will not fail and that we'll return to Him—even after our worst denials. The angels of heaven say, "Go tell His disciples—and [your name]."

davdiestelkamp@yahoo.com

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ANDY DIESTELKAMP, *Editor*
323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, IL 61764
(815) 374-3717 • andydiestelkamp@gmail.com

AL DIESTELKAMP, *Editor-Emeritus*
260 N. Aspen Dr., Cortland, IL 60112
(815) 785-0401 • aldiestel@gmail.com

Web Page: www.thinkonthesethings.com

260 N. Aspen Drive
Cortland, IL 60112

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SACRIFICIAL LIVING

By AL DIESTELKAMP

A FAMILIAR AND OFTEN quoted New Testament passage is Romans 12:1 wherein the apostle Paul urges us to be a “living sacrifice” to God. This admonition calls for holiness and transformation in a world that persistently offers incentives to “be conformed” to our surroundings (v.2). The apostle’s plea is another way of saying, “Don’t get too comfortable in this world.” As I read it, much of what follows in this letter (at least through 15:13) is Paul’s application to the principle of sacrificial living. He proceeds with a call for each one “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” but to use the gifts that God has given in a rational way (v.3-8).

Every congregation of the Lord’s people needs its members to *sacrifice* their personal comfort and use the gifts that God has given them. Men are needed in leadership roles, including teaching publicly, and women are needed to teach children and other women. From the Hebrews epistle we learn that there is a time when we “ought to be teachers” (Heb. 5:12). Some may take the words, “Let not many of you become teachers” (Jas. 3:11) too literally and

out of context. James was not telling people not to become what we *ought* to be. He was not discouraging teaching, but he was warning that one should not teach until he first learned *what* to teach.

This life of sacrifice to which we are called is not limited to being morally pure or even to being involved in the public teaching of God’s Word. This sacrificial attitude should permeate every aspect of our lives. It should impact the decisions of life here on earth as we recognize that we are merely pilgrims looking for a permanent home. When making decisions, whether great or small, we need to be willing to make sacrifices. Decisions from what clothing we wear to what job we seek or where we live ought to factor in what is best for our spiritual lives and our service to the Lord and His kingdom.

Through the years a number of Christians who had decided to relocate have sought my advice about how to choose a congregation near their prospective location. There was at least one inquiry that caused me to suggest that they change their mind about moving to a particular location because they would be too far away from any faithful church. In that case, my advice was appreciated and the family sacrificed a promotion in favor of

their spiritual welfare. Some might be critical of my advice in this situation, suggesting the family start a congregation in that remote location; but such criticism usually comes from those who are comfortably settled where they have multiple congregational options. In most cases, the question of how to choose where to worship has been asked by Christians moving to a place where there were several good options. My advice was always the same: Choose a congregation where you are needed the most. Seldom did people take that advice. Too often the criteria that brethren have used is to go where *they* will be served the best, where *they* will feel most comfortable, where *they* will be the happiest.

However, I am encouraged that I have heard of some young couples whose occupations allow them to work remotely and who have *chosen* to move to locations where faithful churches are few and far between to be a great benefit to an otherwise difficult work. Also, I have occasionally heard of older couples who, in their “retirement” years, have sacrificially chosen to stay or move to places where more workers are needed. May their number increase!

aldiestel@gmail.com