

## Spiritual Progress

Joe Bunch, Rod Himes and John Meyer have been appointed elders of the Margaret Street church in Joliet, Illinois. It's encouraging when brethren "set in order the things that are lacking" (Tit. 1:5). Some are so used to doing without elders that they become satisfied with the *status quo*. Due care must be given to all scriptural qualifications, but when they are met, a failure to "recognize" those "over" us (1 Thess. 5:12), is nothing short of being *unscripturally unorganized*.

—Al Diestelkamp



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# JESUS IS COMING

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

The signs say so. The yard signs all over Pontiac, that is. Actually, the signs were foretelling His coming on video tape in a mass distribution of a 1979 Warner Brothers movie entitled *Jesus*. The Jesus Video Project is part of a nationwide effort to get the story of Jesus into every home in America. Several local churches sponsored the event. First there were the yard signs. Then each home received a plastic bag containing microwave popcorn and an announcement that the video would be arriving. We were encouraged to pop the popcorn, sit down with our families and watch.

To be critical of this movie in view of all the garbage Hollywood usually produces will surely disappoint some, but I am compelled to speak. The gravity of the subject demands it. While it would be legitimate to focus on the content of the movie, it is the evangelistic segment that followed the movie that deserves the most criticism.

Not be misunderstood, let me assure you that I am not critical of the desire to get the message of Jesus into every home in America. Nor can I be critical of the desire to make an evangelistic appeal to those who have heard that message. The message of the cross does nobody any good unless ultimately they make application of it to their own lives. However, the application made by the distributors of this movie was the same diluted message that has typified the evangelical movement in this country throughout the 20th century. At its best it is an abbreviated gospel, and at its worst it is another gospel (Gal. 1:6-10).

Frankly, believers need to return to the word of God for answers rather than to Campus Crusade or any other man-made organization, for "if the blind leads the

blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt. 15:14). That was a warning given by Jesus to disciples who were concerned that some people had been offended by some of His pointed remarks.

The Jesus Video promises, "...you can pray a prayer of faith, and Jesus Christ will come into your life." It invites the viewer to repeat its suggested prayer. Then, assuming that some will have repeated the prayer, the video says, "having prayed this prayer of faith and invited Jesus to come into your life, you can be sure that He came in on the authority of God's holy, inspired word, the Bible. You can also be sure your sins are forgiven, that you are a child of God, and that you have eternal life."

Now we get to the blind leading the blind part. One would think that, if all this assur-

ance is being offered on the authority of God's word, there would be at least one scriptural text that teaches that disciples of Jesus are made through prayer; however, there is not one. Of all the conversions to Christ detailed in Scripture, none mention anything remotely close to the video's suggested prayer.

Warner Brothers' ending with Jesus' great commission as quoted from Matthew 28 was far superior for the purposes of evangelism to that which was tagged on by the Jesus Video Project. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." How? By having them pray a prayer of faith? No, "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (vss. 19,20).

On the day of Pentecost some of the people cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Did Peter respond by saying, "Repeat this prayer after me"? No. Consistent with the commission given to him by His Lord, he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Ac. 2:37,38).

In all the conversions in Acts, non-Christians were never told to pray in order to be assured of salvation. Ironically, the Jesus Video emphasizes a prayer of faith in its evangelistic segment, but doesn't say anything about repentance or baptism. It may not be popular, but I'm going to follow the instructions of Jesus on how to make disciples. Anything which teaches you can become His disciple in some simplified, man-made manner is another gospel.

### **Opportunities to Turn Lemons Into Lemonade?**

As indicated in Andy's article, this effort to evangelize through use of the movie, *Jesus*, is a nationwide campaign promoted by the Jesus Video Project organization. They employ the typical "dehydrated" message promoted by so-called "evangelicals."

As it comes to our communities we might do well to use it as an opportunity to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). We can talk with our friends about the *pure* gospel message, pointing out how the Bible plan of salvation is quite different from the plan offered in the video.

It may also be a good time to place teaching ads in newspapers challenging this perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

—Al Diestelkamp

# You're A Minister Too!

By RICK LIGGIN

It's a sad, but undeniable fact, that the religious world around us has had its influence on the Lord's church. It's downright frightening to see how many Christians have adopted denominational concepts and denominational terminology. This may not seem to be such a terrible thing to us at first, but when we remember that apostasy most often comes in short, subtle steps, we begin to see the very real threat.

To illustrate just one way we have been influenced by denominational religion, consider our use of the term "minister." Denominationalists most often use this word exclusively in reference to those they consider to be members of the "clergy." It is one of their official titles for preachers. But denominationalists are not the only ones who use the word like this. Members of the Lord's church refer to gospel preachers in this same way! It is not uncommon to hear a Christian introduce a preacher as "the minister of our (?) church." Now, there really is nothing wrong with referring to a preacher as a "minister," since that accurately describes him; but when we reserve this term *exclusively* for those who preach, we misuse it. And more importantly, we miss a vital point about our work as saints.

The Greek word most often translated

"minister" in the New Testament (especially in the older versions) is *diakonos*. This word refers to "one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master" (Thayer, p. 138), and it is used in the New Testament to refer to several different kinds of workers or servants. Preachers are certainly called "ministers" (1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Cor. 3:5), but so are civil authorities (Rom. 13:4), and so are Satan's helpers (2 Cor. 11:15), and so is Jesus (Rom. 15:8). In fact, all followers of Christ, including female disciples, are *diakonos* (ministers or servants—Matt. 20:26; 23:11; Jn. 12:26; Rom. 16:1).

There is even a special class of *diakonos*, translated "deacons" (1 Tim. 3:8-13) who have a specific function in the local church, but even here the reference is clearly *not* to those who are preachers. The point that should be obvious by now is that the term "minister" simply is not used in the New Testament to refer exclusively to gospel preachers. We can scold the Mormons for their misuse of "elder" and we can rebuke the denominations for their abuse of "pastor," but we will be hypocrites if we misuse "minister."

Now it is not really our purpose in this article to condemn all those who may have in the past or who may yet in the future misuse the word "minister." We would like to encourage all to be careful not to misuse the

word, but this is not the most important point of our article. The important point is that we all understand that every child of God is a minister! The one who gives his full time to the work of preaching is not *the* minister of the local church. He is *a* minister, but so is every other Christian. This is a lesson that must be learned, accepted, and practiced by every true disciple of Jesus. Our Lord taught: "One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers" (Matt. 23:8,11). All of us are servants of the Lord—and of each other!

It is this lesson that I am afraid many Christians have not yet learned from the New Testament, and herein lies the frightening thing about the influence denominational religion has had on us. You see, our terminology reflects our concepts. Not only do we talk about gospel preachers in denominational terms, we treat them according to denominational concepts. We have come to treat preachers as though they actually are members of some "clergy." Instead of each disciple being a servant or minister, we pay preachers to do our work for us. We deny a clergy/laity distinction in the church, but our words and our deeds betray us!

Please realize that *you*, in a very real sense, are a minister; and as such, you need to be about the business of ministering!

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## Just A Little Bit of Liberalism

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The early steps toward apostasy usually appear to be small and slow-paced. During this time anyone who dares to challenge the authority of anything, which on the surface seems to be "good," is likely to be branded as radical. Later, when unsuspecting and well-intentioned brethren notice the quickened pace of departure they want desperately to stop it, but are powerless to do so. It's like they are in a runaway truck on a downhill road. They try to "hit the brakes," but they can't find the "pedal."

Such, it seems, is the dilemma in which some of our brethren find themselves. Many years ago, while claiming they had not changed their method of determining scriptural authority, they joined with more liberal-minded brethren in their loose *application* of these principles. Of course, the "change agents" with whom they allied themselves were not satisfied with just a taste of liberalism, and ever since have been escalating the pace of apostasy.

This has caused the more conservative among those who like to be known as "mainline" churches of Christ to increase their efforts to denounce ultra-liberalism. For a time this battle was championed in part by Rubel Shelly through his work with the Getwell church in Memphis, Tennessee, and the *Spiritual Sword* publication. Eventually he evolved into one of the ultra-liberals he had previously berated. I have to wonder if he reached a point in which he realized that consistency demanded stricter application of scriptural authority than he was willing to make, choosing instead to develop a "new hermeneutic."

Since most of the publications among "mainline" brethren have gone along with the ultra-liberal trend, a new monthly magazine, *The Gospel Journal*, made its way on the scene a little more than a year ago. The editor, Dub McClish, and others have written significantly on the subject of Bible authority. While they occasionally take a passing swipe at what they call "anti-ism," (with which they don't want to be identified)

most of what they write reads just like it was written by one of us pesky "antis."

Brother McClish, has an on-going series titled, "Some Recent Church History," in which he recounts, from his vantage point, "significant factors contributing to the vast changes that have developed (and are still developing) within the church over the past four decades." In these articles he refers to himself and others like him as "conservatives" and the proponents of change as "liberals." It is clear that within the so-called "mainline" churches a battle is underway that will eventually lead to a separation equal to the one that took place over church support of human institutions and the social gospel concept.

How likely is it that the tide of digression will be stemmed by those who still defend *some* liberalism? It's about as likely as expecting someone to eat only one potato chip—not very! Ironically, some of those who now lament the rapid digression are the very ones who introduced a generation of brethren to just a little bit of liberalism.

# SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Have you ever found yourself taking a position which is more cautious than the mainstream? From modesty to the covering and from dating to homeschooling there are many issues which find brethren making diverse choices in the application of divine principles. Some become lightning rod issues. There is a tendency among those who feel strongly about something to despise those who do not see likewise. However, maintaining humility while promoting a way you have chosen is not easy. As a result, sometimes conservatives are charged with

## Being Naive About Evil

By **RICK LIGGIN**

It's really kind of funny when we run into someone who is genuinely naive about certain things. We sort of chuckle at this innocence, and may even poke a little fun at such a person. But even though being naive may be somewhat foolish at times, it's not always bad. There are some things that we need to be naive about, especially if we are Christians.

The apostle Paul urged, "but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). He means by this admonition that we need to be wise and experienced in those things that are good; but when it comes to our practical experience with evil, we need to be as naive as possible.

And there is certainly nothing wrong with that! Why is it that so many of us just have to experience things for ourselves—especially when it comes to evil? Why can't we be wise enough to learn from the bad experiences of others? You don't have to experience alcohol or drugs or sexual immorality in order to know how awful these things can be! We can know how bad these things are just by listening to the Word of God and the experiences of others who were not wise enough to avoid these evils.

Let's learn to be satisfied with our own innocence, and abhor that which is evil (Rom. 12:9)! Let's be glad that we're naive when it comes to experience in sin. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this! It is really the wise course to pursue! To choose the worldly path of practical experience is to choose the path that leads to self-destruction! Would you please think about that—and just choose to be naive?

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being self-righteous in their cautious choices.

The self-righteous label is often used by people who are insecure in their position relative to those they are labeling. People who fancy themselves conservative feel uneasy when somebody makes choices that appear to be more conservative than their own. Conservatives are uncomfortable being on the liberal end of an issue. Most of the time the charge of self-righteousness is an unfair attempt to make oneself more comfortable with one's own lax or more liberal position.

What does it mean to be self-righteous? My dictionary defines it as being "convinced of one's own righteousness especially in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others." Isn't that oversimplistic? Are couples who choose marriage and are convinced that it is the only moral context for a sexual relationship (in contrast with mere cohabitation) self-righteous?

Maybe the problem is in our understanding of the word righteous. My dictionary defines it as "acting rightly, upright, according to what is right." Using this definition any who are convinced that the way they have chosen is right are self-righteous. Doesn't that make us all self-righteous? Then anybody who dared to charge another with being self-righteous would himself be self-righteous.

However, if we would define righteousness as it is used in Scripture, we would find that self-righteousness is more narrow or specific in meaning and is rightly condemned. Righteousness is justification. They are translated from the same Greek word. Justification is the means whereby we are made right and pronounced not guilty. Self-righteousness is self-justification and implies that we are made right and free from guilt by ourselves and our own good deeds.

This concept is completely foreign to Scripture. Jesus condemned the self-righteous, self-justifying spirit. He illustrated this in His parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. Both prayed to God, but the one who was justified was the one who humbled himself by acknowledging that he was a sinner in need of God's mercy. The Pharisee justified and exalted himself by comparing himself with a tax-collector (Lk. 18:9-14). Justification is not accomplished by being better than others. It is accomplished only by the grace of God (Rom. 3:21-28). This leaves no room for the kind of boasting the Pharisees were known for.

It is a serious charge to accuse someone of being self-righteous. It is to accuse one of thinking that by his better-than-average choices and better-than-average behavior he is justified and pronounced free from the guilt of sin. Just because one is convinced

that his choices are superior to the choices of others does not mean that he believes that God will justify him because of his superior choices

Let's use those who choose to homeschool as an example. I can do this since we have personally made that choice. Regardless of whether or not our choice to homeschool our children is superior to having put them into public or private schools, we are not justified in God's eyes by this choice. I believe most brethren who are homeschoolers know this.

However, allow me to share this warning with homeschoolers. The tendency to feel a spiritual bond with other homeschoolers despite major doctrinal differences on justification is strong. I know that many of you have felt spiritually closer to some homeschoolers than you have your own brethren. You are frustrated that some of your own brethren reject your commitment to your children's education as over-zealous. You find yourself having more in common with homeschoolers outside the church than your brethren on issues of modesty, women's roles, marriage and divorce, materialism, holiness, etc. I know this because Karen and I have had these feelings ourselves.

Our local homeschool support group has some amazing families with great devotion to one another and faith in God. There is a tendency to want to justify them by their works. Ironically, most of them would disavow salvation by works. Yet, if we suggest that one must in faith and repentance be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, we are charged with believing in salvation by works. Brethren, to reject God's clear instructions for obtaining the remission of sins so as to broaden our fellowship to include people with good works is classic self-righteousness. Resist that temptation.

Of course, some brethren will suggest that this is one reason to not homeschool. It causes us to rub elbows with morally good people who are not truly Christians. However, that is no more dangerous than rubbing elbows with people who've "bin baptized" (thank you, Robert Turner) but who are more like the world than those who ain't "bin baptized."

There is no need for brethren to be judgmental of each other over educational choices beyond the fact that the buck stops with us, fathers (Eph. 6:4). No matter the issue (modesty, entertainment, etc.), each of us needs to always remember that salvation is not accomplished by our works but by God's grace. God's grace is not bestowed by our will but by His. He has amply expressed that will in Scripture. Let us all submissively obey it as we throw ourselves on His mercy.

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# Leaky

By **MATT HENNECKE**

Some of you are aware that I have been struggling for over two years to repair a leak in our kitchen ceiling. The problem is that it only leaks when a gusty rain hits the house from the south. There is no leak if we have a gentle rain or if the winds gust is from another direction.

Every time the ceiling leaks I make another attempt to find the cause. After each attempted "cure" I must wait for a gusty southern rain to see if my repairs have worked. So far, no luck. All of my efforts have failed despite considerable expenditures of time and money.

During the last two years I have: 1) had the

# Ceilings

roof vent replaced; 2) caulked all the windows above the leaking area; 3) replaced the siding on the back of the house; 4) replaced the small roof over the kitchen; 5) replacing the flashing on the roof; 6) called at least five different roofers for consultation and work; 7) torn out a section of ceiling in the kitchen to identify the source, etc. Needless to say, my patience began wearing thin many, many months ago (some would say it was threadbare from the start). I have been fighting a battle. Consistently and regularly I have lost.

What is interesting is this: somewhere along the way I have learned a lesson in patience. I didn't want to learn it, but I did. Early on in this "trial" I would get upset and distraught at each new puddle that would form on the floor. Now I simply shrug and grab the nearest mop. I've begun to wonder if the Lord has sent this simple problem my way to change me. I used to get angry and distraught, but now it doesn't really matter that much. In the scheme of things a leaky roof is nothing to lose sleep over. Maybe, finally, I have learned to "...glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope..." (Rom. 5:3-4).

What is the "hope" of which Paul speaks? The hope is a mansion in Heaven prepared for me by my Lord (Jn. 14:2). I can find peace in the assurance that the Heavenly Mansion won't leak. So, I need not worry about my leaky kitchen. What I can do is redouble my efforts to find New Housing prepared for me by an expert Carpenter!

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Once again, many brothers and sisters have voluntarily sent in donations to offset the costs of this publication, wiping out the deficit reported in the last issue. The cost of the past issue was more than anticipated due to the necessity of purchasing an upgrade of the computer software program that generates the mailing list. This was required because of the new postal rates. With the higher rates and a larger mailing list this issue is expected to cost approximately \$500, which would leave a surplus of \$100.59.

## It's COLD IN THE NORTH, BUT...

...there are lots of souls to be saved.

The church in Rochester, Minnesota is searching for a self-supporting, dedicated, well-grounded person or persons to help them.

Rochester is the home of the famed Mayo Clinic and is a very pleasant community. The church, comprised mostly of women and children, is in serious need of male leadership.

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# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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