

The Power of Positive Thinking

When President Ronald Reagan was previewing his speech to be delivered at the Berlin Wall, some in the State Department wanted him to omit the now-famous line, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" One advisor commented that they would never live to see the day when the wall would be removed. President Reagan responded, "That's why I'm President, and you're not."

~Al Diestelkamp

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Positively Optimistic

By RICK LIGGIN

By definition, a "pessimist" is one who is in the habit of or (at least) tends to "expect the worst" (*Webster's*, p. 1063); he tends to see everything in a negative light. A "cynic" is one who believes "that people are motivated in all their actions by selfishness" (*Ibid*, p. 353); he tends to "deny the sincerity of people's motives and actions," and so he denies "the value of living" (*Ibid*). A "fatalist" is one who believes "that all events are determined by fate and are hence inevitable" (*Ibid*, p. 509).

Obviously, all three of these personality traits are negative, and any individual possessing even one of them is bound to be a negative person. But when you have a group that includes people with all three of these traits (a group that includes a cynic, a fatalist, and a pessimist) or (even worse) when you have one person who is characterized by all three (he is a pessimistic, fatalistic cynic), watch out! You surely have a recipe for disaster!

Such negative people not only hurt themselves, but also those around them. They're especially a menace to any team effort. Their negativity tends to break the spirit of those trying to press forward and accomplish something good. The fatalist hurts the group by injecting the idea that: "It's no use to try; you can't change things anyway!" The pessimist hurts the group by seeing everything in the most negative way possible—"We've tried that before and it didn't work" or "that's too hard; we'll never be able to do that!" And the cynic hurts the group by questioning the motives of everyone else—"You're just trying to get your own way" or "you're just trying to put yourself forward!" Indeed, such negative people can really "throw cold



water" on almost any project and break down team efforts to work together.

Now, it ought to be obvious that such negativity cannot characterize Christians. A Christian cannot be a fatalist, since all events are not determined merely by fate, and therefore are not simply "inevitable." God—not fate—controls our world (Jas. 4:15), and He has given men the power to make choices that can change the course of events. The Christian also cannot be a cynic, because cynicism—thinking the worst of everyone else—is just unloving. The New Testament teaches that love "believes all things"

(1 Cor. 13:7), and so it always believes the best about others—especially about other Christians. And Christians most assuredly have no reason to be pessimistic. Because we love God and seek to serve Him, we have every reason to believe—to "know that God causes all things to work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). And "if God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

In contrast to being so negative, the Christian is supposed to be an *optimist!* "Optimism" is exactly the opposite of cynicism and fatalistic pessimism. "Optimism" is defined as "the tendency to take the most hopeful or cheerful view of matters, or to expect the best outcome;" it is the "practice of looking on the bright side of things" (*Webster's*, p. 999). Such a positive attitude ought certainly to characterize us as Christians. In fact, as Christians, we are to be so optimistic that we can even face the difficult trials of this life with a positive, joyful attitude—"knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (Jas. 1:2-3; cf. Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Let me ask you: are you a positive, upbeat kind of person who always tries to look on the bright side of things, or are you one of those negative pessimists who tends to only see the dark side? In local churches, as we try to work together to achieve something good in the cause of Christ, we need positive people—people with an optimistic vision for the future. We don't need negative old "sticks in the mud" who tend to "throw cold water" on all our efforts. If God is for us, who can be against us? Surely He can—and will—cause all things to work together for good. Vision for the future requires us to be positively optimistic.

*"Why are you cast down,
O my soul?
And why are you disquieted
within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance
and my God."*

~PSALM 43:5

824 - 19th Street, Rockford, Illinois 61104
e-mail: rcliggin@juno.com

When The Preacher's Wife Takes A Job - A Reply

By ROY DIESTELKAMP

In the last issue of *Think* (Volume 35, Number 1, January to March, 2004), was an article written by my brother Al, titled "When The Preacher's Wife Takes A Job." The article, whether intended or otherwise left a (preacher's) wife who had a job in less than favorable light. She is not charged with sin, but told: "but we have come to expect better of the preacher's wife." I think it good to offer this reply.

For the record, I have now been preaching for the last thirty-three years, and have been blessed with a faithful wife, Mary, for nearly twenty-four years. We have two sons and a daughter, between the ages of 15 and 21. All are still at home, in high school or university. Except for a couple brief periods of time during our marriage my wife has worked full time as a banker. She is a Christian, servant of the church, Bible class teacher, wife, mother, baker, and banker; indeed she has done it all. She is, ninety-nine days out of a hundred, the first one up in the morning and often last to bed. However, she is a wife, a woman; she will not write this reply; but allow me, her husband, do so.

Al's article noted the common practice today of both spouses sharing "in the production of family income." He then said that "the scriptural admonition to teach women to be 'keepers at home' (Tit. 2:5) has been scoffed at by most, ignored by many others and watered down by some." I would note again, that a wife sharing in the production of family income is not sinful or wrong, but ignoring a wife's responsibility to be a "keeper at home" is sinful.

Editor's Note

I know many people are surprised when brothers in the flesh, who were raised in the same home, have differing convictions on controversial issues. When I published the article, "When The Preacher's Wife Takes A Job," I was well aware that there would be many brethren who would take issue with it, including some of my closest friends and relatives. My brother, Roy, requested that I print his reply in the paper, which I agreed to do without comment other than this note to acknowledge that we respectfully disagree on this matter of individual application of the scriptures. I trust you will give the same consideration to his reply as to my article. For those who did not see the article to which Roy is replying, it is available upon request from me, or it can be viewed on the Think website. Also, rest assured that, even with our differences, we maintain a mutual love and respect for one another.

~Al Diestelkamp

Al's article referred us to Titus 2:5, which teaches older women to teach younger women: "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." I agree the modern world often disobeys every one of those principles. They sin.

However, what does a wife actually do, who is a "keeper at home?" Does this mean she must stay at home, and she may not take a job out of the home? Does it mean that if she does take a job that she is setting a bad example, or an example that is not as good as it should be? Likewise, does a preacher whose wife works, inevitably avoid preaching about Titus 2:5; or effectively explain away what it said? This is an overreach of the article in the last issue.

Other versions do use other phrases for Titus 2:5. The NKJV says: "homemakers," the NIV says: "busy at home," the RSV uses the word: "domestic," and the NASB and ASV read here: "workers at home." Ought a wife to be a homemaker? Yes. Should she be busy at home? Correct. Is she to fulfill domestic duties, and work at home. Certainly. And, when she does, she too is a keeper at home. While doing these things, wives may also be working out of the home.

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, that

Al referred to, is an ensample of that principle. She did work in and out of the home. She did not work out of "need," in the sense of poverty, widowhood, or some calamity or distress. She worked for the betterment of her family. She made sure her family had food, supervised her maidens, bought a field, planted it, saw her merchandise was good, clothed her family in expensive scarlet, had silk and purple clothing, made fine linens and girdles and sold it, and worked from early morning to bed time, in and out of the home, for the good of her family. We would say today, she worked for some "extras." She was not a real estate agent, but she could have been, if there had been such.

Did she set a bad or lesser example for other wives? The inspired writer said these words of commendation: "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:10-12). "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Prov. 31:30-31).

123-1/2 Keefer Street, Thorold, ONT L2V 4N1
e-mail: rdienstelkamp@cogeco.ca

James W. "Billy" Boyd Passes

James W. Boyd, faithful gospel preacher and elder, died June 5, 2004 at the age of 76. Billy, as he was better known among brethren, was born February 25, 1928, a son of James and Cora Boyd. After serving his country in the Navy, he attended David Lipscomb College, graduating in 1952.

Born and raised in Tennessee, Billy left the "Bible belt" to preach and teach more than 50 years in the upper midwest, working effectively with churches in Wisconsin, Minnesota and northern Illinois. During most of his life he supported himself by teaching high school and college. In 1992 he retired from the college of DuPage where he was a professor of computer science.

Billy was one of a number of preachers in the upper midwest who waged a spiritual battle with the forces of liberalism that infiltrated churches in the 1950s and 1960s.



Billy Boyd
1928-2004

His solid Bible knowledge was accompanied by strong conviction and gifted speaking abilities.

He had served as an elder, first in Downers Grove, Illinois, and later with the Congdon Avenue church in Elgin, Illinois. Through the years he helped to train younger men to preach and teach the gospel. Despite his heavy schedule, he always had time to serve the church.

He and Geraldine, his wife of 53 years, raised four children, all of whom became and have remained faithful Christians.

Billy faced many health problems in the last few years. He did so without complaint and in deep faith in the Lord.

Having spent the last 38 years working with churches in the greater Chicagoland area, the visitation and funeral in Elgin, Illinois was attended by hundreds of brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as others from the community.

Shane Scott preached the funeral, with Norm Webb, Ray Ferris, Rey Rodriguez and Jerry Lawrence making comments. Three hymns were sung by those gathered, led by Craig Bean. Three of his grandchildren read scriptures or poetry written by Billy.

~Al Diestelkamp, reporting

SELF-EXAMINATION

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Many of us have a negative association with the word test. I know, some of you reading this enjoyed taking exams, but that was probably because you were prepared for them. Even those with high grade-point averages probably did not relish taking tests for which they were unprepared. The uncertainty of how we will perform when tested causes us to dread exams. Despite the apprehension and uneasiness we may have at the prospect of taking a test, we know that tests are important.

Testing is an important spiritual activity. To test means to examine and scrutinize, to determine genuineness or ability with a view toward approval or improvement. We see this usage in scripture in reference to a man who wanted to see what his newly purchased oxen could do (Lk. 14:19). In more modern



By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

A lingering memory from my childhood is my mother's voice, warning me as she swept the floor, "Stay out of my dirt!"

As I think back on it, I am somewhat amused and intrigued by how possessive my mother was about a small pile of dirt. After all, I know that much of what she called "her" dirt was actually my doing.

It seems that once she put forth the effort to gather "my" dirt into one spot where it could be whisked into a dust pan for permanent disposal, that it qualified as "her" dirt.

Perhaps that illustrates how our Lord feels about our sins that He sweeps away by His blood. Indeed, He took on the sins of many as if they were "His" (Isa. 53:12; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24).

A mother knows that she'll have to sweep up future messes, but *this* dirt is now "hers," and she expects her children to stay away from it. I realize it isn't a perfect analogy, but the Lord also knows that we'll sin again, but he expects us to stay out of "His" dirt so that He can clean up our mess.

It's called repentance.

times, we start the engine, look under the hood, and take the car for a drive to see what it can do. We often don't mind tests if we are the ones giving the test.

Certainly, in spiritual contexts, it is important that we "test all things" so as to discern between good and evil (1 Thess. 5:21,22). Unfortunately, many are unprepared to do this because they personally have not grown as they should spiritually (Heb. 5:12-14). As a result, many have little ability to apply scriptural principles to current issues so as to "test all things." Unless the scriptures explicitly say, "Thou shalt not..." many are unable to determine if something is contrary to the will of God. Why is this? Because instead of being transformed through renewed minds, many have conformed to the world and, therefore, are not able to test and approve what God's will is (Rom 12:1,2).

This testing is not limited to doctrines but extends to people as well. Those who would serve as deacons are to be those who have been proved (1 Tim. 3:8-10). In other words, they have been first observed and examined in their behavior and are then appointed as deacons when found blameless.

The apostle Paul told the Corinthian Christians that he was testing their sincerity and challenged them to complete the doing of what they had said they intended to do (2 Cor. 8:1-15). Sincerity is tested or proved (shown to be genuine) by willingness and perseverance.

Jesus praised the church in Ephesus for exposing false prophets by testing them (Rev. 2:2). John tells us to test the spirits to see if they are of God (1 Jn. 4:1). Indeed, we are not to be spiritually gullible.

Yes, testing is an important spiritual activity. However, when it comes to testing, we have likely found it easier to be diligent in testing others and their doctrines than in testing ourselves. The ability to test or prove becomes most valuable and practical when we first examine ourselves. Even the spiritual man must beware when attempting to restore one who as been tested and found wanting (Gal. 6:1). If we think ourselves to be something, when we are nothing, then we just deceive ourselves (vs. 3). On that basis each of us is admonished to examine (test, scrutinize) his own work (vs. 4).

This self-examination is primary and prerequisite to being the spiritual one who can restore those overtaken in trespasses. Thus it is imperative that we first remove the beam in our own eyes before we pick specks out of the eyes of others (Matt. 7:3-5). Many of the Jews knew the truth ("approved the things that were excellent") but were then hypocrites in the application of truth to themselves (Rom. 2:17-24). This gives occasion for blasphemy by those who have not ap-

proved the things that are excellent and who have no interest in any so-called excellence that apparently allows such hypocrisy.

Christians have often fallen into the same trap into which the Jews fell. Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, we prove what is truth and expose error but then fail to practice what we preach. We must always keep in mind that, even if we have all knowledge, without love knowledge is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). We examine and correct all of the externals that can be tested by the word of God, but we often neglect the internal self-examination necessary to becoming the truly spiritual people who can restore others not just externally, but internally as well. Before we can effectively examine others as to whether or not they are in the faith, we must examine and prove ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5).

Diligence in self-examination keeps us humble and selfless in all of our relationships and activities. The Christians in Corinth were described as carnal; this made any discussion of spiritual things nigh unto impossible (1 Cor. 3:1-3). For them the Lord's Supper (a spiritual fellowship meal) had turned into a carnal, selfish feast. Their profane attitude despised the assembly that had come together for holy purposes. This was the "unworthy manner" that was bringing guilt upon a number of the saints (1 Cor. 11:27).

Part of Paul's remedy was for each participant to "examine himself." I believe many have misunderstood Paul's instruction. The Lord's Supper is not intended to be a time for self-examination or to determine personal worthiness. The examination of self is to precede and therefore guide the attitudes and actions of the participant. Prior self-examination with a view toward approval or improvement would result in the proper partaking of the Lord's Supper. "Why am I gathering with others to eat this supper? To remember Christ's sacrifice and share with my brethren in the proclamation of His death" (vss. 23-26).

If we would first examine ourselves to determine that our motives are spiritually sound, then our manner will more likely be worthy. Of course, this principle applies to more than just the Lord's Supper. We must be ready to test and examine ourselves in all areas of our lives; and, in so doing, we will be of greater and more effective use in the kingdom of Christ.

Testing is an important spiritual activity! "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts" (Prov. 17:3). God knows about our willingness, sincerity, and loyalty. When is the last time you examined yourself?

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: adiestel@bwsys.net

Authority From Necessary Inference

By AL DIESTELKAMP

“Can necessary inference be established as a scriptural means of determining authority from the New Testament, or is it a long-standing tradition?” This question was posed by a brother who seems willing to recognize authority derived from commands and approved examples, but has difficulty seeing necessary inference as legitimate.

While I will agree that determining authority by way of necessary inference is “trickier,” and should be approached with great care, I believe it is legitimate. I believe it is more than simply long-standing tradition as I will show.

First, we need to make sure we understand the word, “inference.” To “infer” is “to derive as a conclusion from facts or premises” (*Meriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). Therefore: Infer = judge, conclude, perceive.

Unlike the words, “command” and “example,” this word is not used in scripture, which may be why our brother is suspicious of it as a means of authority. However, “conclude,” “perceive” and “judge,” synonyms of the word, can be found in scripture.

Within the definition, the dictionary advises, “see imply.” That is because an inference can never stand alone. There must be an implication in order for there to be a necessary inference. There can be no necessary inference unless it is based on information from statements, commands, approved examples, or some combination thereof.

In order for an inference to be authoritative, it must be a *necessary* conclusion. There are many *possible* inferences we might make based on sketchy information, but unless we can determine that the Holy Spirit has implied something, we cannot draw a *necessary* inference. When one draws

a conclusion without an implication he is merely surmising.

Let me cite three approved apostolic examples of the use of necessary inference:

Notice that when the time came for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles that God never directly told Peter that salvation was available to the uncircumcized. Instead, He gave him a vision, sent messengers to where he was staying and sent the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household so that they spoke in tongues. From these events Peter was able to *perceive* the truth that men of “every nation” could be accepted if they would work righteousness (Ac. 10:34-35). That was the only conclusion he could reach from what God had revealed. That’s a necessary inference.

The apostle Paul was able to *conclude* that God is the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Rom. 3:28ff). His conclusion was based on Abraham being justified by faith apart from the law (Rom. 4:1-3).

Perhaps the clearest example of the use of a necessary inference is provided by James during the debate over circumcision. In this situation we have the apostles recognizing the use of a *statement*, an *example*, and a *necessary inference* all in one context. In establishing authority for conversion of the uncircumcized, Peter makes a *statement* that God “chose” that “the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe” (Ac. 15:7); Paul and Barnabas then cited an *example* of God working signs among uncircumcized Gentiles (15:12); and finally James draws the *necessary inference* by saying, “Therefore, I *judge* that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God” (15:19).

So, to answer our brother’s question, Yes! Necessary inference has been established as

a scriptural means of determining authority from the New Testament. It is not merely tradition.

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Editor AL DIESTELKAMP
P.O. Box 891
Cortland, IL 60112-0891
(815) 756-9840

E-mail al@thinkonthesethings.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

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Cortland, IL 60112-0891

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