



By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

For the last century a sexual revolution has been taking place in our culture. This is not all bad. The subject of human sexuality is not at all foreign to the Word of God. Neither is Scripture's handling of this topic limited to a bunch of "thou shalt not's." However, there are many who, not liking the Scripture's clear limitations on sexual expression, prefer to characterize the Holy Bible as, at best, hopelessly out of touch with the present culture and, at worst, oppressive and hateful.

Yet these people forget that Jesus and His disciples came with the gospel into the culture of the Roman Empire which, if compared to our own, would likely make our culture look rather sexually tame. In other words, the message of God's Word was presented to a culture that was much more libertine in its sexual mores than is our own. If the high ideals of God's plan for human behavior were not softened for the immoral culture of the first century, then there can certainly be no cultural argument for softening it now. The fact is, the Scriptures do not have archaic values but values which transcend time and culture.

The Scriptures not only permit sexual activity; they promote it and command it (Gen. 1:28; 2:24; 9:1; Prov. 5:15-19; Song of Solomon; Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:1-9). The reason the Bible is vilified by the sexual libertines of our culture is that the Scriptures are equally clear that the sexual activity that God authorizes is limited to the husband/wife relationship of marriage. Indeed, marriage is honorable and the bed is undefiled, but any sexual union outside the committed relationship of marriage is fornication (immoral sex) and is condemned (Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 6:9,10).

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Authority and the Sexual Revolution

God has always made it clear that He is holy, His Word is holy, and we must be holy (1 Pet. 1:15,16) if we are to have fellowship with Him. Though our physical bodies are created of the same elements which comprise the rest of God's creation (Gen. 2:7; 3:19), we are distinctly superior to the plants and animals. We are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26,27). While sex is a natural physical behavior, God expects us to control our flesh with the spirit that is in His image. When we act on our physical urges without the control of the spirit, then we behave like animals rather than humans (Gal. 5:16-25). That is not holy.

Sexual activity outside of marriage dishonors God's will for man. Certainly humans are capable of copulating with whomever, whatever, whenever; but such behavior is not holy. While it might be understandable that those who reject God would resort to sexual activity that is as promiscuous as the animals from which they believe they evolved, professing Christians cannot endorse such immoral behavior, no matter how it is labeled (1 Cor. 6:13-20).

It is becoming popular among many who profess faith in God to redefine everything from marriage to love. A favorite argument in the current debate over homosexuality is to observe that Jesus never condemned homosexuality. While at first glance that may appear formidable, it crumbles when it is observed that He also never specifically condemned polygamy, prostitution, pedophilia, or numerous other specific sexual relationships. When a debated position finds its strongest argument in what Jesus never specifically condemned, then it is indeed weak; for authority to act is not found in the absence of condemnation.

The toleration of heterosexual sin has opened the door for the toleration of homo-

sexual sin. If we are going to ignore the standard of God's Word, then there is absolutely nothing to stop the continued degradation of human sexuality to the level of animals in all respects. God has called us to a higher and holier standard. That some (or even most) people refuse to acknowledge or abide by that standard does not change that standard. As a society we may amend our laws to suit the will (or whim) of the people, but this does not change the standard.

The opposition to sexual immorality is not rooted in hatred or some sort of phobia. It is rooted in respect for the authority of God's Word and His divine order. As Creator, He knows what is best for His creation. To disrespect God's design, order, and revelation is to disrespect Him and is certainly not holy. Elevating our lusts to being as acceptable and valid as God's Word is exactly what Eve did in the garden (Gen. 3:6).

It does not matter how many times lust is called love; it does not make it love. The cavalier warping of the meaning of love is being used in an attempt to justify all kinds of perverse behavior. Sexual immorality is not love (1 Cor. 6:13,18). God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). He defines love and He defines what is morally upright.

While the foregoing absolute statements are enough to exasperate those who wish to have the sexual freedom of animals, such people have no basis on which to object to any kind of sexual expression, consensual or otherwise. The inability to see beyond their own lusts have them sowing the wind and reaping a whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). That observation is not motivated by hate but by love combined with hope that beings created in the image of God might come to see the folly in ignoring the will of God.

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

If Noah, Daniel and Job Were In America

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The Lord sent a message through the prophet Ezekiel warning, “when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it” (Ezk. 14:13). Jehovah had been very longsuffering in His dealings with Israel, but He wanted them to know that if they despised His past blessings by persisting in idolatry, the Hand that had protected them would turn and strike them.

When reading this, I couldn’t help but think of my own beloved nation. Who could possibly deny that God has richly blessed America? With a rich history spanning over two hundred years, we may be tempted to expect God’s continued blessings regardless of our “idolatries.” It’s time to wake up and understand that “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

Don’t get me wrong, our nation has always had its flaws, some of which were rather grievous. We may have succeeded in removing some of our national sins over the years, but like Israel of old, “the high places were not removed” (i.e., 1 Ki. 15:14). America is quite proud of the fact that slavery was abolished, and that progress has been made in racial relations, but these have been replaced by acceptance of other abominable sins.

Can we rightfully expect Almighty God to continue to send showers of blessings on a nation that flaunts and promotes immorality? Our nation claims to be “under God,” and yet those who are trying to remove any reference to God (other than in profanity) are having their way in the laws and courts of our land.

A nation that claims to favor “justice for all” should not expect God’s approval when it gives women who are “unloving” (Rom. 1:31) the “right to choose” the murdering of innocent unborn children. Nor are we endeavoring ourselves to God with attempts to

justify what He has condemned. Forces are at work to redefine marriage to include lifestyles that God calls “shameful” (Rom. 1:27). Of course, this perversion comes only after respect for God’s marriage laws has already eroded through our nation’s acceptance of premarital “living arrangements” and divorce for any cause.

God has been willing to spare whole cities for the sake of a few righteous people. Abraham tried to negotiate a deal with God on behalf of Sodom, the wicked city where his nephew Lot was living (Gen. 18:22-33). As few as ten righteous souls could have spared Sodom. Lacking ten, angels transported “righteous Lot” (2 Pet. 2:7) and his family out of that wicked environment just before God rained down brimstone and fire.

Perhaps God has spared America because of the relatively few righteous souls within her. Also, the freedoms of speech and religion, which have provided an environment suitable for the spread of the gospel, may be why “God shed His grace” on America.

Past mercy on our nation does not necessarily insure future mercy. There is a limit to God’s patience. This is illustrated in God’s

pronouncements against the inhabitants of His holy city, Jerusalem, whose idolatry persisted even after God had blessed them. God was so angry that He declared, “Even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness” (Ezk. 14:20). To me, the implication in this statement is that the presence of righteous men could normally turn God’s wrath away, but Jerusalem had become so vile that *even these* righteous men would not save it.

There may come a time, if America persists in unfaithfulness, that even the likes of Noah, Daniel and Job will not deter God’s judgment on the nation. However, the good news is that “the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (Jas. 5:11). Also, He is “slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:13).

We, as His people have an opportunity to help our nation by being the “salt” and “light” our savior called us to be (Matt. 5:13-16). Indeed, the greatest service you can give to your nation is to “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good” (Rom. 12:9).

THEY’RE NOT THE SAME

Reading and studying...

...we must be investigating and thinking when we read

Studying and remembering...

...we must make what we learn part of us

Remembering and knowledge...

...we must do more than remember facts, it must change how we think

Knowledge and understanding...

...we must want and try to understand what we know from Scripture

Understanding and wisdom...

...we must look for and find proper real life applications

Wisdom and application...

...we must actually apply God’s will to ourselves and others

Application and complete obedience...

...we must not pick and choose what and when we will obey

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

We are sometimes fooled by externals into thinking we (or others) are what we are not, or doing what we are not. Reading salves our conscience because we think we are studying—but we’re not, we are just reading. We do good, deep Bible study, but don’t do enough (or often enough) to remember what we learned. A good memory sometimes passes for deep spiritual knowledge, when it is only the ability to recite Scripture. Knowledge and un-

derstanding are necessary, but are fruitless without wisdom—the ability to see practical applications. And wisdom fails when consistent application is not made, when complete and consistent obedience doesn’t follow.

The above is true in any field of learning, but never more true than in our growth in the “knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet. 1:2). Don’t stop until you have them all!

940 N. Elmwood Drive, Aurora, Illinois 60506
e-mail: davdiestel@yahoo.com

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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

'That's What We Pay You To Do!'

By KEITH BARCLAY

It is with great trepidation that I undertake this writing. I serve as both an elder and an evangelist. I think this gives me a unique perspective to talk about this issue. I trust objectivity is achieved and truth illuminated.

What is to be the relationship between the local assembly of believers and those she supports? Would we treat an elder worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17) the same way we do preachers? There are few men who are serving as shepherds who receive support for such, but it is certainly authorized by scripture (1 Tim. 5:18). Do we make a distinction in roles and thus a distinction in how we view the relationship?

There seems to be wide diversity of thought on this issue. There are those, like myself, who could not expect any better relationship than that which I currently share with the brethren in Normal, Illinois. There are others who have either been mistreated, or have mistreated those who trusted them. As a result, both the preacher and the congregation find themselves a little skittish and apprehensive when it comes to defining and implementing the relationship between them.

That a financial relationship may exist between the two is readily seen from numerous texts (Phil. 4:15ff; 1 Cor. 9:13f; 2 Cor. 11:8; Gal. 6:6). That is not the focus of this article. What I desire for us to look at is the approach we take with regard to preachers and their work. Let me say that there is certainly latitude regarding all of the particulars of how a congregation and the preacher work out their arrangement. I am not addressing such, but want to focus my attention upon the "big picture" and the attitudes I find to be healthy and beneficial for all concerned. Above all, I believe they are biblical.

It seems that in a number of situations that a "business model" has become the norm. While I do not deny that there are business aspects to the functioning of a local congregation, the local congregation is not a business. In much the same way that the church has organization, but is more than an organization—it is a living organism (a body, a bride, a kingdom, etc.)—the church does some business, but is far more than a business. That should be reflected in its relationship with preachers and elders who are supported for the sake of the work that they do.

While we speak of budgets and bills (both of which are business issues) we will also speak of fellowship, partnership, working together and submitting to one another when

it comes to the relationships we share with preachers and elders. How do we view those who have devoted their life to the preaching of the gospel? Our attitude toward them and their attitude toward their work (I know, this sounds awfully like a business word) needs to fit the Lord's model rather than the successful business model of the day.

The preacher is not the "Public Relations" man of the group. He is not the "cheerleader." Neither is he the one who must rescue the children, nor spin a yarn to entertain visitors, so they will be enticed to return.

Despite the "That's what we pay you to do" approach of some, he is not a taxi service, or a delivery boy or the "official hospital visitor." While he certainly should, as a fellow believer, share in those legitimate things we are all to do, they are not a part of the Lord's job description for the work he is called to do. (This list could easily be expanded but borrowing from the apostle Paul's approach in Galatians 5:21 allow "and things like these" suffice.)

His work is to "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Tim. 4:2 NIV). It will involve study, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved,

a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15 NIV).

The congregation, in providing financial support, is enabling a brother to do what scripture defines as his work in this regard. Are there men who will take advantage of such a situation? Sadly, yes. But the solution is not a "business model" that requires more paperwork than the IRS. The solution is accountability with him just like with any other member of the congregation. Communication, constant and consistent, are far more valuable than confrontation, contention and control.

If you treat the preacher or elders as "hirelings" (Jn. 10:12f), do not be surprised when they behave in that manner. Those of us who preach need to do everything we can not to give brethren pause about supporting another man after we leave. Nor should our work habits be so poor that the next brother must endure an unprofitable, if not ungodly, approach by the congregation toward him and his work.

If you recognize the partnership you share and what a source of encouragement you can be, I am convinced the difference in the quality and quantity of the service rendered by your preacher or shepherds will be readily evidenced.

Let's all take a fresh look at what the New Testament says regarding the relationship between the preacher and the congregation and the supporting of elders. It may have a rather refreshing outcome.

2415 Grey Fox Tr., Bloomington, Illinois 61705
e-mail: keith.barclay@comcast.net

'You Are Out of Your Mind!'

By STEVE FONTENOT

When the apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa and the Roman governor, Festus, endeavoring to persuade them concerning the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Festus "said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind!'" (Ac. 26:24). Maybe he thought saying it loudly would add force to what he said, for he certainly did not show where what Paul said was irrational. Maybe he was just upset. Evidently what Paul said was new, and sounded strange to him (25:19,20). This, however, was no reason for rejecting it as incredible. What Paul said was not only rational, it was truth.

How do we react when we hear something relative to the will of God that is new to us

and sounds strange? Maybe it is so far out it is not worthy of further attention. But, we must be care-ful...that's what Festus thought. How do we decide? We could weigh the evidence. But, that re-quires work (thinking). And, it may require change...big changes. That may be fearful.

A much easier course is simply to say, "that's crazy!" and dismiss it. It may not be a new approach, but it eases our consciences and influences our friends not to listen (what would happen if they were persuaded...?)

Paul responded, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth" (v. 25). How true and how sober Festus will discover with certainty in judgment!

18542 Crestline Road, Humble, TX 77396
e-mail: sp63@mac.com

No Complaints About Pink Elephants

By DOUG CYRUS

Back in 2005 a Federal Court of Appeals declared Atheism a religion. Recently some atheists exercised their status as a religion, to force the governor of State of Washington to allow them to put up a 4½-foot-tall sign declaring that there is no God and that “religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.” You will notice from the wording of their sign that while claiming to be a “religion” they proclaim “religion” to be a “myth and superstition.”

They can propagate this conflicting message in good conscience because they do not consider themselves to be in the religious category of “myth and superstition.” They know something that the federal government doesn’t know: that they are *not* a religion. They just use their status as a religion to harass those who are actually religious.

According to Webster, the word “religion” is a combination of the prefix “re,” meaning “back” as in “repay” or “pay back,” and “ligare,” meaning “to bind together.” In its strict sense religion is only descriptive of those who are “binding themselves back” to God.

Atheists do not try to “bind back,” but attempt to separate themselves from God by expressing their belief that there is no God. They are not “for” anything; they are only “against.” They demonstrate sincerity to their philosophy by demeaning religious



people who are binding themselves back to God. Since they claim not to believe in God’s existence it would be foolish for their enlightened minds to harass God. Their total existence is dependent on the existence of religious people. Without religious people what would be their point?

Atheists’ denial of God reminds me of the little boy who ate a piece of chocolate cake

that he was not supposed to eat. When his mother found him playing in the next room, before she could say a word he looked up with chocolate on his face and proclaimed: “I didn’t eat any cake.” If he wasn’t involved in eating any cake then why did he feel the need to deny it?

If there is no God why should an Atheist say anything? Minds and hearts are hardened and enslaved by such things as money, work, nature, television, etc., that give purpose or enjoyment to life. Why should they care what you choose to believe in? I doubt that Atheists believe in pink elephants, but you don’t see them proclaiming their a-pink-elephant-istic views to the world. If Atheists were truly consistent with their philosophy they would be very busy disclaiming all the things they deny exist. They could then harass excessively inebriated souls who believe in pink elephants, and children who believe in Santa.

Their reason for proclaiming there is no God is only relevant if they truly believe there is a God. An analysis of the motive for the Atheistic philosophy clearly shows their rationality of action exist only in their underlining belief that there is a God to deny. To quote Sir Francis Bacon “A little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.”

If Atheists continue developing their philosophy with integrity to themselves, eventually they will conclude that the existence of a true Atheist is based not on rational thought or science but on necessity of self delusion for the purpose of self justification. God simply says:

“The fool has said in his heart, there is no God,” (Psa. 14:1).

2647 E. 200 N Rd., Pana, Illinois 62557
e-mail: abcnine@hotmail.com

39, Going on 40

With this issue of *Think* we mark the beginning of our 40th year of publication. When we first began this labor of love in 1969 we never envisioned that we would still be publishing in 2009. We are humbled, and also encouraged, by the many expressions of appreciation for our efforts from readers all over the world. It is our hope that this paper has been—and will continue to be—beneficial to many, and a glory to God.

~Al Diestelkamp

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As we enter the 40th year of publication, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed to make this publication possible for the past 39 years. This issue is expected to cost about \$500, which would leave us with a deficit of about \$181.

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