

"a sow, having washed,
to her wallowing
in the mire"

2 Pet. 2:22



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

January-February-March, 2013 • Volume 44, No. 1

Reasons Fallen-Away Christians Don't Return to the Lord

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Let me begin by saying that what I'm about to write is motivated by a sermon I heard from my good brother, John Nicholson. Unfortunately, I didn't have a pencil with me, so I can't duplicate all his applications, or will I necessarily use the same scriptures, but I was able to remember his main points for use in this article. Perhaps it ought to be pointed out that John began his sermon by acknowledging that he got the idea for his sermon from an old sermon outline his father-in-law, the late Bill Allen, had passed on to him—an outline that brother Allen had received from the widow of an even older preacher, Olan Hogue. Who knows, maybe brother Hogue developed his thoughts as a result of someone else's sermon.

This illustrates the value of preachers listening to other preachers instead of always being the one in the pulpit. It also indicts the notion that every sermon (or article) has to be original material. I suspect that those who boast about never using other people's sermons or outlines as a springboard to their own are fooling themselves. But I digress.

Brother Hogue's sermon was a five-point lesson about "Reasons People Reject The Gospel of Christ." Brother Nicholson's sermon acknowledged that what brother Hogue said so many years ago still is true today, and then used the same points to point out "Reasons Fallen-Away Christians Don't Return To The Lord." Despite the so-called excuses offered by those who have left the Lord, the real reasons are the same as why the lost refuse to obey the gospel:

Love of the approval of men. The pressures to conform are great. Jesus calls us to be different, while the world wants us to line up with them. Hence the apostolic warning to "not be conformed to this

world, but be transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Failure to be transformed makes conformity to the world a sure thing. Christians who have become "weary" of "doing good" (Gal. 6:9) are susceptible to false doctrine as well as unrighteous living. To some in the first century who had turned away from the Lord the warning is "if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

Love of sin. The fact that sin is usually packaged as something attractive and enjoyable has long been a strong temptation in Satan's arsenal (i.e., Gen. 3:6). The fact that the gospel requires repentance is one of the main reasons people reject the gospel, and it is also why many Christians who have yielded to the lusts of the flesh fall away and will not come back. The Bible describes the condition of those who "have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," but are "again entangled in them" as worse than before becoming Christians, and as disgusting as a dog eating his own vomit, or a just-washed pig returning to the mud puddle (2 Pet. 3:20-22). Until one recognizes the true ugliness of sin, he will maintain a love of sin and not seek forgiveness.

Love of family. While this is a good thing, God's word makes it clear that such love must not exceed our love for Him. Jesus made it clear that in some cases one's "foes will be those of his own household" (Matt. 10:36). Hosts of people have been confronted with the gospel only to reject it because of misdirected love of family members. Likewise, some who have obeyed the gospel eventually leave the Lord in order to please their unbelieving family members. Little do they realize that the most loving thing they can do for their loved ones is to be a faithful Christian.

Love of ease. The way of truth is not the path of least resistance, and for that reason the gospel message is spurned by the spiri-

tually lazy. "I just don't think I can live the life of a Christian" is a response we sometimes hear from people who have heard the gospel but have spurned the invitation. Those who fall away sometimes take a page from that playbook, claiming that they've tried, but have found it too difficult to be a Christian. Instead of seeking the help of the Lord who has promised to "never leave" or "forsake" them (Heb. 13:5), or even accept help from fellow-Christians who are ready and willing to warn, comfort and uphold them (1 Thess. 5:14), they take the easy way out. They haven't yet learned the hard lesson that "the way of the unfaithful is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

Love of lies. A perverted gospel message is often more appealing than the truth. Perhaps that is the reason for the apostle Paul's rather emphatic warning to consider "accursed" any who preach any other gospel than what was delivered (Gal. 1:6-9). The popular doctrines of "faith only" and "once-saved, always saved," are two prime examples of "pleasing doctrines" that men love to believe despite the plain teaching of the apostles of Christ. When a child of God falls away it is not unusual to hear them talk of receiving "new light" on the scriptures. In other words, they love the lies. They need to be reminded of how God's prophet foretold shame on unfaithful Israel "Because you have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood" (Jer. 13:25-25). Like the psalmist we wonder, "How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood?" (Psa. 4:2).

I remember how, as brother Nicholson revealed each reason, I was able to put a name with each one—sometimes more than one name. How tragic it is to realize that men and women with whom we once shared close fellowship in the Lord have allowed their love for anything or anyone to "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6).



Articles From the Days Gone By

What Were You Looking For?

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** (1911-1995)

Jesus was trying to show those who had surrendered to John's teaching that John's purpose was really to prepare them for the One who would come after him (Lk. 7:24-30). To stress this lesson, Jesus asked them some very pointed questions:

1. Did you go out to see a reed shaken in the wind? That is, did you expect John to be a mealy-mouthed, milch-toast whom you could push around, and who would tickle your ears?
2. Or did you expect John to be a sophisticated socialite who would appeal to your own vanity, and who would conform to your own worldly ways?
3. Or perhaps you expected John to be sim-

ply a prophet who would reveal future events, or perform some great feat before you?

Of course we know that, regardless of what they went out to see in John, the multitudes were convinced of their sins and brought to submissive repentance (Matt. 3:1-6). John surely did not beckon with a wavering hand or speak with a quivering lip. He did not reason with them about past events or future prospects on earth. He did not make his appeal as a "man of the cloth," as a dignified representative of some sect, but his appeal was to their conscience and their will.

There may be similarity in this and attitudes we see today. The people may think of a preacher as an ambassador of good will, a rather simple man who should try to please

everybody, or a dignified, scholarly gentleman who, in deep, resonant tones speaks great swelling words of insignificance!

But, like John, the preacher today must come to the people with determination to bring them to Christ. He must go everywhere with "the sword of the Spirit," bringing sincere people to total submission to the gospel of Christ which was anticipated in the kingdom message John preached long ago. It would be well, also today, if preachers could imitate the character of John by demonstration of condescension coupled with courage and dedication that did not waver in the face of death.

This article first appeared in THINK, Vol. 6, No. 3, dated March-April, 1975

LEARNING TO THINK FOR OURSELVES

By **RICK LIGGIN**

If you really want to grow up in Christ, then you're going have to learn to think for yourself! You're going to have to come to understand the word of God for yourself and develop your own faith, a faith that will motivate you to use the word of God to make the kind of choices that you must make to please Him!

Preachers and elders have to understand that if they really want to help people grow, they have to help people...and let people think for themselves. Too often, elders and preachers are tempted to simply "indoctrinate" church members, rather than helping them to learn and think for themselves. To indoctrinate someone is to teach him "to accept a set of beliefs *uncritically*" (Oxford, p. 681); it is to get him to blindly and unquestioningly accept a certain set

doctrines! When a person is simply indoctrinated, he does not think for himself, nor does he develop a faith of his own.

Worse yet, when we as teachers indoctrinate, rather than teach folks to think for themselves, we "lord it over" their faith—something we must not do. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he would not "lord it over" their faith, and then added: "for in *your* faith you are standing firm" (2 Cor. 1:24). People will only stand firm when they stand in a faith that is their own...a faith based on their own understanding of God's word.

Indoctrinating people is certainly easier, but it doesn't really help them. Oh, they may say all the right things...the things the teacher wants to hear; but they are not speaking from their own faith. They are simply "parrotting" the faith of their teacher, and that's not good!

At times, preachers fall prey to this temptation when people want answers to their Bible questions. The temptation is to just give the person the "bottom line" answer, rather than pointing him to the word and helping him think through the answer for himself. After all, if the preacher takes the time to help him think through the question for himself using the Bible, he may not reach the right answer quickly. In fact, he may even at first reach the wrong answer...and then more study and work will be required. In such cases, it's so easy to just give the "bottom line;" to answer the question for the guy and send him on his merry way.

But such indoctrination will not really help the person. It only makes him dependent upon his teacher...and it won't affect

any real or lasting change in his behavior. Real and lasting change in people's conduct only comes when they are individually and personally convicted that the change is necessary. Indoctrination with the "bottom line" does not produce that kind of conviction.

Elders also, sometimes, fall prey to this temptation as they try to keep unity in a local church. Independent thinking in Bible study, at times, can produce a temporary diversity of views in a local church. Why? Because not every member is equally capable of accurate, solid study, nor of careful, clear thinking. And so, when a variety of differing views begins to emerge within a congregation, elders are often tempted to resort to "indoctrination." They begin to discourage independent study and independent thinking, and they even squash any effort to openly study controversial issues. What they don't realize is that when they do this, they step over the line; they begin to "lord it over" the faith of others...something even the apostle Paul said he would not do (2 Cor. 1:24)!

Indoctrination does not help people grow up. It only cripples them. Independent thinking and Bible study, on the other hand, will not hurt a person if his heart is right! If a person's heart is right, he will, in the end, find the truth (Matt. 7:7). But if his heart is not right, he will not be acceptable to God, even if we "lord it over" his faith by indoctrinating him in the truth. If we really want to stimulate growth, then we must teach people to learn and think for themselves!

*315 E. Almond Drive, Washington, Illinois 61571
e-mail: rcliggin@gmail.com*

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

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

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

E-mail aldiestel@gmail.com

Web Page www.thinkonthesethings.com

THE FINGERPRINTS OF GOD

By DOUG CYRUS

If a person's fingerprints are found on an object you know the person has touched that object. You have detected their presence. It is interesting how God reveals His presence in the Bible by hiding information that obviously has His fingerprints all over it. Proverbs 25:2 says: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter." Who would have thought that the creator of the universe would like to play hide and seek?

Isaiah 40:22 says: "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers..." Isaiah was written about 700 BC or 2,192 years before Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492, proving the world was round. How did Isaiah know the world was round? He probably didn't, he was just speaking for God as a prophet does. But, he did leave a fingerprint of God for us to find with the help of Christopher Columbus. Thus we see a fingerprint of God in the Old Testament—evidence of God's presence.

What about the New Testament? Hebrews 11:3 says: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." You will notice that this verse does not say that the things we see were made from nothing, but that the material things in this universe were made from things that cannot be seen with the physical eye.

Einstein expounded the theory that $E=MC^2$ where E is energy, M is mass, and C is the speed of light in a vacuum, which is 299,792,458 meters per second. What Einstein theorized was that material things are made from energy.

A.O. Schnabel, in his book *God Has Spoken*, comments on Hebrews 11:3 saying, "Scientists now understand that all matter is composed of small unseen particles, thus described as things that are not apparent. In fact, the further science probes into matter, the more it is revealed that matter can be considered in terms of energy. For example, the actual matter in the human body would be smaller than the head of a pin." Brother Schnabel has a degree in aeronautical engineering and works at Boeing Aircraft Company.

The earth gets its energy from the sun and yet, before the energy strikes the earth where it can be reflected, it cannot be seen. Space is a very dark place, although, a tremendous amount of energy passes through it.

How did the writer of the Hebrew letter know that the things he could see were

made from energy that he cannot see? He probably didn't, he was just speaking as a prophet for God. But, he did leave a fingerprint of God for us to find with the help of some men of science like Einstein.

When people ask, "Do you really think God wrote the Bible? Just reply, "He must have...His fingerprints are all over it."

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

RELEVANT FAITH

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

Many churches, including those that still wear the name of Christ, give emphasis to the wrong things. In some cases these include things that are wrong (without scriptural authority), but in others they are things that are external—physical things wrongly emphasized (given too much importance).

Paul was concerned about the negative impression that a local congregation might leave on unbelievers or otherwise uninformed visitors. Regarding the carnal and chaotic assemblies of the dysfunctional Corinthian church, Paul rebuked, "will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor. 14:23). This apostolic admonition clearly warns churches that *carnal* behavior will be an occasion for stumbling or blaspheming.

However, we must not draw the erroneous conclusion from this comment that Paul wanted churches to be *primarily* concerned about what outsiders think or say about them. This is not a valid proof-text to support the latest project proposed to make the church more attractive. Indeed, Paul *knew* that what the earliest disciples confessed about Jesus Christ and Him crucified *would* be a stumbling block to many and foolishness to others (1 Cor. 1:23). Yet, many modern churches, not wanting to be thought "out of their minds," have rejected the bodily resurrection of Jesus (cf. Ac. 26:23,24). And many such things they do, "making the word of God of no effect" (Mk. 7:13).

The Scriptures teach that to reject the resurrection is to render faith in Christ vain (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Yet, our culture has widely renounced Scripture as a relevant authority, and, so have many churches. To suggest that today's churches should pattern their teaching and behavior after the New Testament record of the earliest churches is thought to be very archaic. Unsurprisingly, many churches not wanting to be thought irrelevant, "out of their minds," or out of step with cultural evolution have exchanged faithfulness to the Word for popular ideas that are imagined to be more rel-

evant. Thus, churches find themselves caving to the ignorant ideas and carnal values of the unregenerate in the hopes of winning them to the Lord whose word they have already declared irrelevant.

Most churches are concerned about numerical growth, but that is not the concern of churches of Christ. Good churches understand that, while some plant and others water, it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6,7). Many churches imagine that their future growth and expanding ministries are critical to the health of the kingdom of God. They are not. There is not one local church from the first century that remains, but the kingdom of heaven remains. It shall stand! The churches that belong to Jesus understand that their treasure is not here on earth (Matt. 6:20), that all of this is going to be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10,11), and that the only church with an enduring future is "the church of the firstborn [ones] registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:23).

The churches that belong to Christ want people to come, not to their churches but to Jesus Christ, because salvation is only in Him. When churches of Jesus Christ get concerned about people going to "other" churches, it is not because one can only be saved if he/she attends their churches, but because one can only be saved if one is faithful to Christ.

The fact that most churches are not preaching the faith that was once for all delivered through the apostles and prophets of Jesus Christ (Jude 3) is what concerns the churches of Christ. That many have actually exchanged the truth of God for lies (Rom. 1:25) concerned the first Christians (cf. Gal. 1:6-10; Rev. 2:2), and it remains the concern of all the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing more relevant to men of faith than truth. If we want to be truly relevant to a lost and dying world, then we must know and love the truth. Anything else is a scam. Therefore, woe to those who call that which is irrelevant relevant, and that which is relevant irrelevant (cf. Isa. 5:20).

323 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: adiestel@frontier.com

'You...Them...The Church'

By STEVE FONTENOT

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer” (Matt. 18:17) [emp. mine, srf].

Observe: (1) One Christian is *not* a church, and when one Christian does something we *cannot* conclude it is the “church” doing it (“listens to you”... versus...“listens even to the church”). (2) Even a plurality of Christians does not necessarily comprise a “church,” and we *cannot* conclude that when Christians do something the “church” has done it (“listen to them”—these Christians together confirmed this man’s guilt and reproved him; “listen even to the church”—a later and separate reproof by the “church”).

“Church” is a collective noun, like “army” or “herd.” An “army” collects soldiers, a “herd” collects cows, and a “church of Christ” collects Christians. You cannot have a herd of cattle without a cow, but for the same reason one cow does not make a herd, one Christian does not make a church. You can’t have an army without soldiers, but just as three soldiers eating together (e.g., one Russian, one Iranian, one Ameri-

Self-Test:

1. Anywhere there is a Christian, there is a church.
 True? False?
2. Whatever Christians do, the church does.
 True? False?
3. Whatever Christians are authorized to do, a church is authorized to practice.
 True? False?

can) do not constitute an army eating lunch, so a number of Christians doing something together does not necessarily mean a “church” has done something.

So what? To find scriptures that state what Christians did or were authorized to do *does not prove churches did those things or that churches of Christ were authorized to do those things*. To say that the church is composed of Christians and therefore, “What I do the church does,” or, “What I am authorized to do the church is authorized to do,” is *not* so. The people who comprise the church have individual responsibilities as family members, citizens, and neighbors that do not fall into the realm of work God assigned the church “of Christ.”

Individuals can form, coach, and support baseball teams for their children—but there is no authority for “church of Christ baseball teams.” Individuals can work for a business to support themselves or establish a hospital to provide services for their neighbors—but these are not the work of a “church of Christ.”

Individuals can campaign for political office and organize political organizations for the furtherance of civic goals—but the

Lord’s church has no business in politics. When you kiss your wife, the church has not kissed your wife! When Christians have a picnic at the park, it does not justify calling it or making it a “church picnic”—organized and supported by the church. While some duties (as “reproving” the offender) may be performed individually (as “you” and “them”) or as “the church,” even then when the individuals act it does not follow the church has acted—the Lord’s language demands a difference.

We must, brethren, learn and maintain the difference in individuals *viewed and acting individually* or in individuals *acting collectively in secular pursuits*, and in individuals *viewed and acting together as a “church of Christ.”* Failure to do so will insure confusion and pave the road for apostasy in the work of the Lord’s church.

18542 Crestline Rd., Humble, Texas 77396
e-mail: sp63@mac.com

'Tis the Season

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The beginning of God’s message through the prophet Isaiah reveals His contempt with Judah and Jerusalem. He declared them “a sinful nation” (1:4).

He goes on to tell them He’s “had enough” of their burnt offerings (1:11), and His soul hated their various forms of worship (1:13-15). As a nation they had refused to put away their evil ways, and so their attempts at worship was an abomination to God.

I can’t help but think, given our own nation’s rejection of God, the recent seasonal focus on the birth of Jesus does not impress Him one bit.

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:

Printing & supplies	\$ 85.00
Postage (U.S. & Canada)	412.56
Foreign postage	39.90
Return Postage (15)	6.75
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 544.21
Funds available for past issue	1,513.38
Surplus	\$ 969.17

Donations: (as of 12/31)

Aretha S. Richardson, GA	40.00
Bill & Gale Conway, MO	25.00
Ray F. Dively, PA	100.00
Milburn E. White, AR	200.00
Jerry & Sue Brewer, AL	50.00
Hazel McIntosh, MO	50.00
Keith & Debra Storment, TN	15.00
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 480.00
Surplus from past issue	969.17
Funds for this issue	\$ 1,449.17

We are ever thankful for the many brethren who have continued to make this publication possible through their voluntary contributions. This issue is expected to cost approximately \$550, leaving a projected balance of about \$899 toward future issues.

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

P.O. Box 891 • Cortland, IL 60112-0891

Return Service Requested

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Cortland, IL
Permit No. 11