



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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'Go to the Ant...Consider Her Ways'

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

Out in this “bush country” ants are very plentiful and are a real pest. One morning I got out of bed at 4:20 to go on an early morning appointment for preaching, and, before I could light a lantern, ants were biting me. Upon investigation I found that “line ants” had invaded our house. They form a line about an inch wide, and travel over and under and around almost any obstacle. There will be millions of them in a line extending for great distances. On the afore-mentioned morning they had formed a line *around* our bed, into the bathroom and *around* the toilet, then back into the bedroom with the line even extending up *over the bed* on the mosquito net. It was a rather harrowing experience. I hurried out on my appointment and left my wife in bed, surrounded by the ants. By the time she got up they had also gone into our son’s room. When they bite, it hurts, but if you leave them alone and do not step too near the line, they will not leave the line to bother you.

The lesson Solomon had in mind when he said, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Prov. 6:6), was a lesson in diligent industry. No doubt, it needs to be observed even in the life of a Christian who would be fruitful. Jesus said that we are branches on a vine, and that if we bear no fruit we will be cut off and cast into the fire (Jn. 15:6). But fruitfulness is no accident. If we hope to be a fruitful branch we need to consider the ways of the ant and imitate its industry. I have never seen an ant asleep! Always they move about with vigor and enthusiasm. They seem to be hurrying to a very important work. The work of a Christian is the most important of all, yet we are often inclined to linger, to rest from our labors, to plod along as though time was unimportant.

If most Christians manifested the same attitude toward their secular work that they do toward their work as Christians

Articles From the Days Gone By

This article, which first appeared in TRUTH MAGAZINE, Vol. 4, No. 10, dated July, 1960, was written while the author was preaching in Nigeria, West Africa.

they would lose their jobs quickly! On the other hand, if we would manifest the same enthusiasm for the Lord’s work as we do for our secular work, we would preach the gospel to the whole world in this generation! God has not commanded that we convert the world, but He has asked that we preach the truth to all people. This we *could do* if every Christian would imitate the ant!

If a Christian would consider the ant’s actions and follow them, he would busily engage himself in study, prayer, benevolence, etc. Too many Christians can be classified as sluggards just as Solomon expressed it. They are too lazy even to pray except when someone leads them in public prayer. (It does take time and diligence to really pray to God in secret).

They do not really study the word of God and meditate upon it, for it is easier to allow their thoughts to wander about in the world of materialism. They do not have the zeal to show compassion for the unfortunate, for it does take time, energy, money and patience to help those who cannot help themselves.

To many Christians, worship is a burden, not a real privilege as it should be, and religious work is a matter of legal procedure and not an action that proceeds from a heart of love. (Let it be remembered that all religious work *must* be in harmony with law—God’s law—and that *zeal must be directed by knowledge of truth*. However, some who seem to have great zeal for truth fail to manifest the same zeal for the work which that truth demands).

In many cases the zeal that Christians do have is misdirected into pursuit of material things. Many Christians will spend \$30 for a good Bible for themselves but will only give one dollar for tracts or Bibles for the

lost. They will donate an “extra” twenty dollar bill for a new rug for the pulpit, but they will only give the unfortunate beggar a dime. Some churches will spend \$400-\$500 for support of a preacher for a meeting within their own building but will send a paltry few dollars to a preacher in a new field and expect him to work thirty days for it. Some preachers will hustle vigorously to promote themselves into bigger and better jobs but have little time or energy to go out and seek the hard, new places of labor.

Zeal Plus Unity

But the ants have given me another good lesson. Just this morning I saw a group of them moving a small piece of bread. They were not just moving it across a floor, but *up a perpendicular wall*. In order to accomplish this, *many of them worked together*. They manifested the same zeal that always characterizes ants, but they also showed great unity in action. There were just as many ants around that piece of bread as could get around it. They all were pushing or pulling it in the same direction. Up, up, up it went, because they all worked together. I watched them intently for a few moments and wished so much that brethren would just imitate them!

I am not advocating that brethren stifle their consciences to work with others. It is not my desire to say that we should engage in all work that all brethren do. For conscience sake I must refrain from that which is not clearly authorized by truth. However, in every area of agreement—in all that “is right and cannot be wrong” because it is taught in the New Testament—we could do well to imitate the unity of the ants. I think it is safe to say that the ants are not motivated by love; yet brethren are commanded to love one another, and our love for the Lord and for the truth should certainly cause us to desire such unity as will enable us to go forward together in full discharge of our duties and in fruitful work in the Lord’s service.

‘CUT TO THE HEART’

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

We have all found ourselves suddenly in the possession of knowledge that stuns us and forces us to reconsider what we have always thought about something. It is often an uncomfortable feeling that is sometimes punctuated with a rush of adrenalin. It is good that we have these feelings, that we are capable of being “cut to the heart” by truth that we had not heard before or by applications that we had not considered.

The gospel of the kingdom of heaven, though ultimately good news, begins with the bad news that we are sinners who need to repent (to reconsider and change). Those who heard Peter preach on Pentecost after Jesus’ death were told by witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection “that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Ac. 2:36). Three thousand on that day received this stunning information in such a way that it moved them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (vss. 37-41).

Of course, that is not always the response to truth. We don’t know the number that *heard* the gospel that Pentecost day, but estimates of how many would have been in Jerusalem to potentially see and hear the apostolic witness would make the number that responded positively an extreme minority out of all who could have.

The application of truth is dangerous business in more ways than one. Firstly, the applier of truth must be very diligent to correctly handle it (2 Tim. 2:15) because there is a stricter judgment for those who presume to teach (Js. 3:1). Secondly, the correct application of truth does not guarantee its reception and often makes enemies (Gal. 4:16). When Stephen addressed the Jewish council with bold application, they too were cut to the heart; but instead of repenting, they resisted and finally stoned

him to death (7:51-60). Indeed, as Stephen and others soon found out, following Jesus is not a path to popularity but to persecution. This observation is not made to discourage teaching and applying the truth. On the contrary, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.... Blessed are you when they revile... and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...” (Matt. 5:10-12).

Many see the importance of being receptive to truth when it comes to convincing others of *their* need to reconsider and change. For example, we think it important to point out to those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord that they must “Repent, and ...be baptized...for the remission of sins.” That truth may stun those who for years have been convinced of their personal relationship with Jesus. It may cut them to the heart. And even though more people will resist that truth than will receive it, we preach and apply it anyway. But are we as receptive when confronted by truth that challenges what *we* have believed or practiced as we expect others to be?

Long time readers of this paper know that I have periodically addressed the subjects of abortion as well as widely-accepted artificial methods of birth control that have the potential of acting as abortifacients (i.e. The Pill). Such subjects arise and require our consideration because our culture has largely rejected the truth of God’s word to which we strive to hold fast. In this world we are supposed to live as “blameless and harmless, children of God without fault” and “shine as lights” (Phil. 2:15,16). Yet, we are subject to being deceived and following the ways of the world without giving adequate thought to the truth and its application to those worldly ways. When someone dares to question ways in which we may have naively followed the unethical ways of this world, how do we respond? Are we cut to the heart? Do we ever consider that maybe we acted without due diligence? Are *we* willing to reconsider and change?

For example, did you know it is estimated that there are approximately a half-million human embryos warehoused in various clinics throughout this country? I didn’t get that figure from conservative, pro-life, religious-right sources. Notice this headline from *Mother Jones* magazine seven years ago: “Souls On Ice: America’s Embryo Glut and the Wasted Promise of Stem Cell Research.” The sub-title reads, “How 500,000 frozen embryos are forcing

us to rethink life, choice, and reproductive freedom.”¹

Many sources (liberal and conservative) have acknowledged the growing problem created by the common practices of fertility clinics using in vitro fertilization (IVF). The typical practice of fertilizing more eggs than are wanted is to increase the odds of a successful pregnancy. Freezing the left-over embryos enables parents to save time and money and come back for them when they are ready for more children. Of course, this explains why there is a glut of unclaimed frozen lives. Life happens: sickness, divorce, death, or other inconveniences interfere; minds change. Of course, parents should do the responsible thing and come pick up their kids, but they don’t. (And some can’t.)

The solutions offered to alleviate the surplus vary from simply discarding them to using them for research to adopting them. How could any who believe human life is valuable from conception consider the first two “solutions” as possibilities?

Of course, a first step would be to stop the practice of fertilizing more eggs than a mother is presently willing to carry. The problem is not with the technology of IVF but with the typical practices that attempt to ensure “success.”

A second step would be to no longer allow the freezing of human life. The cryogenic process subjects embryonic human life to risk such that from 20 to 40 percent will not survive the freezing and thawing.² Of course, the IVF industry sees little concern with this since it typically fertilizes more eggs than it needs. However, Christians should not be so cavalier toward the lives they create.

A third step would be to use the technology of IVF to rescue these hundreds of thousands of “souls on ice.” Instead of couples using IVF in a way that contributes to the glut of embryos, they could choose to adopt those embryonic children who have been orphaned by their naive or negligent parents.

Too much information? Hopefully it is enough to cause Christians to reconsider and change their approach to infertility in ways that honor all life created in the image of God. Cut to the heart? If you have used these freezing methods naively, don’t defensively resist the truth; repent. Go pick up your children from the clinic and give them the opportunity to finish their lives. God loves repentance, and “He is faithful and just to forgive us” (1 Jn. 1:9).

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¹ <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2006/07/souls-ice-americas-embryo-glut-and-wasted-promise-stem-cell-research>.

² <http://www.ivf.net/ivf/embryo-freezing-is-it-safe-0335.html>

The Needless Homosexuality Debate

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Recent public statements by famous people have fanned the flames of controversy over whether the practice of homosexuality is sinful. To the child of God the issue was settled long ago, but unbelievers continue to look for reasons to justify various forms of perversion. In referring to unbelievers, I include many who would claim to be believers, but who chose to believe only what they *want* to believe.

The newly-elected unholy father of the Catholic Church issued a statement which has been interpreted as welcoming homosexuals into their unholy priesthood. The statement was carefully worded, not stating a position on whether it would be sinful for such men to act on their desires.

In a statement explaining why he signed a bill banning therapy that tries to change a child's sexual orientation, Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ), who appears to want to be our next president, declared homosexuality to be "innate" and "not a sin." This goes directly against what God has revealed. "Innate" means, "inborn, natural." Unlike Gov. Christie, God's word says it is both "against nature" and "shameful" (Rom. 1:26-27).

The debate over the *cause* of homosexuality is needless, since whether one's "sexual orientation" is determined by genetic makeup, by environment, or by choice does not change the fact that God has ruled on what is acceptable behavior. We are not permitted, with our Creator's approval, to satisfy our desires (natural or unnatural) except within the bounds of His guidelines. The Lord is clear in regard to this matter. He created us "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) and said, "the two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:5). In order to avoid sexual immorality, marriage between one man and one woman was ordained (1 Cor. 7:2), and declared as "honorable" and its bed "undefiled." All other sexual relations are described as falling under His judgment (Heb. 13:4).

Homosexual acts are only one category among many that fall within the definition of fornication ("sexual immorality" in most modern translations). Heterosexual men and women who seek fulfillment of their lusts outside of God-authorized marriage are also among those that "God will judge." Indeed, God does not show partiality when judging our conduct (1 Pet. 1:17).

Just as there are many unmarried men and women with desires toward the opposite sex who must control their urges in order to maintain purity, so must those

who are inclined toward homosexuality. So, whatever one's sexual inclination, if one chooses not to marry (or for any reason *cannot* marry), celibacy is the answer.

When Jesus' disciples reacted negatively to His teaching about divorce, concluding, "it is better not to marry" (Matt. 19:10), Jesus acknowledged that not all would accept His teaching (v.11). He offered two examples of forced celibacy (those born without the ability or inclination to marry, and those surgically rendered eunuchs). Then He said that there are also those who have "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (v.12). In this third category He includes those who choose celibacy in order to advance the kingdom (like the apostle Paul) or because they prefer to go to heaven.

The world doesn't think it fair that some may be forced into a life of celibacy by circumstances beyond their control. Granted, it is a burden, but one that is not limited to

those who are homosexually inclined. It is also shared by the person who cannot find a suitable mate; the widow or widower, the married person whose spouse is no longer physically able to satisfy sexual desires, and the unscripturally divorced person—just to name a few.

Societal pressures to accept homosexual behavior as "normal," and "not a sin" is increasing. I am particularly disturbed by governmental legislation that prohibits parents from seeking therapy for children who are homosexually inclined. Besides this being an intrusion into parental authority, what is to prevent them from expanding that ban to the adult population? Then it would be only a step away from legislating against preaching that calls for repentance. Already, some are trying to categorize this as "hate speech." In reality, any call to repentance is "love speech" because without it people will perish (Lk. 13:3,5).

Poles, Shoulders and Authority

By STEVE FONTENOT

After the tabernacle had been constructed at Mt. Sinai and the children of Israel were preparing to depart, God gave instructions for its transportation. After Aaron and his sons had prepared the holy objects and furnishings of the sanctuary, "...the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them..." (Num. 4:15).

Is this statement generic or specific? Is the authority it gives generic or specific?

The statement specifies who is to carry the ark: "the sons of Kohath." It does *not* specify *how* they are to carry it. The statement is generic (including any way of carrying it), but the authority as to *how* to carry it is specific; that is, more specific than can be understood from this statement alone.

"Authority" (the right to rule) resides with God. Commands, statements, what people did, and inferences are all to be considered in arriving at what God authorized. Harmonizing these and the contexts in which they are found enables one to arrive at what he has "authority" (right to act) to believe or practice.

The reason the authority as to how the ark was to be carried is more specific than the statement alone in Numbers 4:15 is because of additional statements that must be considered.

In Exodus 25:14, Moses was commanded to put "poles into the rings on the sides of

the ark, to carry the ark with them." In Numbers 7, when six carts donated by Israel were distributed among the three Levitical divisions, Gershon received two and Merari received four, but the Kohathites received none, "because theirs was the service of the holy objects, which they carried on their shoulders." (v.9)

So, considering these additional facts, we conclude that while the statement to "carry" the ark was generic, what God authorized was more specific, i.e. the Kohathites were to carry it on their shoulders by means of the poles inserted in its rings. Note: God did *not* give generic authority to carry the ark in any fashion in Numbers 4:15, though the statement to "carry" it is generic. We cannot conclude what is "authorized" until we have gathered *all* the pertinent facts, interpreted them in the light of their context, and harmonized them.

Did God expect them to understand this? Read 1 Chronicles 13 and 1 Chronicles 15:1-15, (esp. 15:13-15). Indeed He did! "Perezuzza!"

Commands, statements, what people did, and inferences are indicators of authority. They are given to us so we can understand God's will, what He wants us to believe or do, what He has "authorized." Do not confuse the indicators of authority with the authority itself.

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How Do You Read It?

By KEITH BARCLAY

I would like to take a moment to ask you when you last felt awestruck by a given biblical text? When you read in the Old Testament of God using Moses to part the sea and then using that same sea to destroy Pharaoh's army, what type of response does it elicit? Reading of Jesus' transfiguration on the high mountain: what is your initial reaction?

Do you think God intended the reaction to His written revelation to be so markedly different from those who were eyewitnesses to the events written about?

At least in one respect God clearly tells us He intends for the written revelation to produce in us (readers) what it produced in them (eyewitnesses): faith. John's gospel was written for this purpose. The seven (eight, if you include the resurrection) miracles John writes about are intended to produce faith in us, just as those miracles had been intended to produce faith in those who witnessed them.

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:30-31 - ESV).

John 2:23 and 11:45 illustrate that the miracles Jesus performed resulted in belief. The miracles also brought about a number of other reactions that I am afraid we miss

when we read. We read of people who "marveled" (Matt. 8:27; 9:33); individuals who are in "awe" (Lk. 5:26); and folks who are "amazed" (Lk. 2:12). It has been my experience that we (people I have been associated with over the last 40 years as a believer) have difficulty being moved in these ways as we read about what Jesus did or God has done as They moved and worked in the lives of people. We have tended (myself included) to read academically. Our intellect is affected, and it should be, but we stop short of being awed—of marveling at what we have read.

Amazement is not a common word in our vocabulary, especially when it comes to our study of Scripture; yet that is the reaction of those who encountered Jesus in the flesh. Why should I get a pass when it comes to my reaction to the Son of God?

The fact that I can even use that phrase "Son of God" in any relationship to myself or us as a people should produce wonder! When you add to this the things we read about Him doing and saying, how can we walk away from our reading, pick up the sports page, or the remote, and be more impacted by the events of the day or the entertainment world than we are by the deeds of a great God who makes it clear He is transcendent (Isa. 55:8-9)? We are called by a God Who cannot be exaggerated! Does this not suggest we ought to spend time marveling in His greatness, being awed by His power, and finding His love to be awesome? Do we "Stand Amazed In The Presence" of Jesus?

I am thankful, regardless of how late it has come in my life, that I have come to realize how important it is to recognize what an awesome God we serve. I spend time every day, if I do not allow life to crowd it out, considering just how incredibly wondrous our God is by reading texts which

convey such things. The Psalms are full of such writings as are the gospels. Even the histories of ancient Israel offer moments of great wonder and awe. Read them. Put yourself into the story. Assume the role of one of the individuals in the story. Maybe you are the one writing the story. When I read in this way it has a significant impact upon me that reading the text to simply answer a question does not.

These moments increase my faith. They produce reverence and respect. Prayers are prayed with more fervency. I hope my life reflects such encounters by heartfelt obedience. Above all, I believe it aids me in sharing my God and Savior more readily with others. It places upon me a sense of urgency to tell others of this awesome, marvelous God Who cannot be exaggerated.

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A Sleepy Church

Someone has illustrated the danger of a sleeping church by representing Satan as offering a prize to the demon who should do the most harm to the kingdom of God. One sank a ship with 500 Christians aboard—but all went straight to heaven. One aroused a terrible persecution—the result was shining martyr crowns, and the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church. But the prize was given to the one who, by the enchantment of prosperity and the soothing song of worldliness, put a church to sleep.

~An Overturned Barrel

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