



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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The Beginning & End of Sin

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

We are not told how much time passed between God's Day Six observation that everything He had made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and the conversation between Eve and the serpent (3:1-5). Suffice it to say that it was a relatively short time from the beginning of the world to the beginning of a problem.

The world was of God's making, and the problem was of *man's* making. This is not to excuse the serpent (a.k.a "the Devil and Satan" - Rev. 12:9). We, the created, are all to be blamed (Gen. 3:12-19; Rom. 3:9-23).

Some are more inclined to blame God for creating the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, its prohibition, Satan, or the world. These inventive complaints are typical of a culture which demands independence and autonomy but shuns personal responsibility or bewails the consequences of its choices. We can't have it both ways, but this does not keep us from complaining either way.

Freedom of choice and self-determination bring the inevitable demand of responsibilities. Freedom from the constraints of responsibilities relegates us to the status of animals under the constraints of instincts or cages and oblivious to anything different. Having been created in God's image, we have freedom, including the freedom to ignore God's will and to reason for ourselves.

There is much to be learned from the beginning of the problem of sin which still has application to us. Satan's consistent mode of operation is to take what is good and twist, sully, or otherwise pervert it into ways to serve ourselves rather than God (cf. Rom. 7:8-13). He does this through subtle emphasis on the negative (Gen. 3:1),

distortion, contradiction (3:5), and appeals to our flesh and pride (3:6). He does this not for *our* good but for himself (1 Pet. 5:8).

We recognize the rationalizations Eve used to talk herself into choosing sin because we have used them ourselves. We have felt the strong appeal of fleshly appetites. We have been allured by something attractive. We have desired greater knowledge and understanding. There is nothing inherently wrong with *any* of these. Yet, when these wants and desires trump God's will, we sin.

Contrast the free but selfish attitude which rationalizes our sins with Jesus' equally free but selfless "nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Lk. 22:42). Then stand in awe that those selfless words were said in submission to His Father's will to make "Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Sin is an ugly word. Efforts to point out sin are often met with derision and mockery. To many, sin is *not* ugly but to name something as sin *is* ugly (mean-spirited, judgmental, intolerant, unloving, etc.). This twisted/backward thinking results in the mislabeling of good and evil which is the signature of Satan (Gen. 3:4,5). Isaiah warned, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20). Yet, even among professing believers in God there are those who are inclined to diminish the seriousness of sin, forgetting the nature of sin and its end result.

"Sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). It is transgression of the law of God. To sinners, sin may seem to be par for the course of human life ("I'm only human" is the standard excuse for sin.), but to God sin is offensive and no light problem. It is presented from the beginning as *the* preeminent problem because of its end.

Sin ends in death. God said as much from the beginning. "In the day that you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Though the word *sin* is not specifically used in this context to identify what Adam and Eve did, it is later referred to as sin (Rom. 5:12-14). While some are inclined to dismiss eating forbidden fruit as a relatively minor infraction, God's Word does not. It is this first sin which opens the door to all future sin and is the basis of the remainder of God's revelation of grace. To diminish sin is to diminish its consequences and to diminish the love and grace implicit in the solution to the problem.

The word *sin* is first used in the story of Cain and Abel. As Cain's unjust jealousy and anger intensified, God warned him that "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Sin is personified as a visitor to whom we should not give an opening lest it rule over us. In disregard of that divine counsel, Cain murdered his brother and revealed the ugliness of sin and its association with death. Sin kills.

Sin is a problem common to *all*, not by inheritance but "because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). The end result is that our sins separate us from our holy Creator (cf. Isa. 59:1-3). In the day that Adam and Eve sinned, they were removed from the garden of God and from access to The Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22-24). Sin "brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). While death is the end result of the problem of sin, thank God this is not the end of the story. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

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SET on a HILL

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). Like it or not, want it or not, as Christians we radiate. Jesus Himself says our role is illumination, and it does not make sense to think we can or should turn that light on and off when we feel like it. His darkness-dispelling brilliance in us cannot be hidden anytime or anywhere.

Never have these words of Jesus been more needed than in our age of the internet and social media. The internet teems with promises of apparent anonymity, celebrity, relationship, information, entertainment, and influence. That we are Christ’s light of the world can easily get lost in the confusion. We must not forget that Christ in us should be visible in our online presence. Here are some things to shine:

Non-Directional Light

“You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14) means that we can impact a wide audience. What we say and post online is rarely private. Think of everyone—friends, enemies, unbelievers, people you hope to influence someday—seeing what we post and assuming it is a reflection of Christ. Generally, the internet is a hill on which what we post cannot be hidden.

Glorifying, Thanksgiving, Praise, Contentment

“Do all things without complaining and disputing...” (Phil. 1:14). We cannot shine light through a filter of darkness. If we are set on a hill and hate our lives—our bod-



ies, our weather, our jobs, our enemies, our government, our finances, our families, our church, the DMV—what darkness are we dispelling? Christlikeness changes us in practical, daily-life ways which enlighten rather than depress others.

Love Truth

Second Thessalonians 2:9-12 describes those who perished “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Our love of truth begins with Scripture and spreads to everything in our lives. Urban legend, gossip, unsubstantiated claims, pseudo-science, and anecdotal evidence are not adequate proof on any topic for lovers of truth. Sharing or liking falsehoods on any topic can dim the confidence of others in the light of truth we project to the world.

Speak Truth in Love

“...speaking the truth in love” is one of the goals of letting our lights shine (Eph. 4:15). There is a time for strong rebuke, mocking, and even ridicule, but

social media paints with a broad brush and reaches a wider audience than those deserving of a tirade. This does not mean being silent or politically correct. It means replacing position statements with Biblical arguments and flippant rhetoric with strong Scripture used in context. Our responses to our world should radiate the fact that we love God and others enough to show them the gospel.

God is All

It has never been easier than it is now to forget Jesus during daily life. Does what we post and “like” ever hint that “All things were created through Him and for Him”? (Col. 1:16). Social media offers us a sense of popularity, even celebrity if we get enough friends or followers. And people care about what we eat, drink, and wear! Do our pages shine self-centeredness, materialism, or even narcissism, or do they reflect thankfulness to God for all we have from Him to use in His service?

We are not invisible or neutral online. When we go on the internet we need to remember: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). We don’t have to only post Scriptures and Bible lessons, but our comments about everything from politics to the weather should reflect a different mindset, a different light, from that of the world. With my apologies to James 1:19—may we be swift to hear, slow to wrath, slow to post.

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KIMBERLY’S BIBLE

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Having grown up using the King James Version of the Bible, I continued to rely on it in my study and preaching for several years. Then I tried some of the more modern translations for a while, but I was not with satisfied until I bought a New King James Version in 1983. I have been using this translation ever since.

After a few years, normal wear-and-tear demanded that I replace it. Because I had learned to find passages based on where they are on the page layout, I wanted a new copy of the exact same edition. However, as is the practice of Bible publishers, the Thomas Nelson company had discontinued this edition, so I began searching for “used, but not abused” copies. This has become almost an obsession for me as I purchase every copy I can find and afford.

Just recently, I was able to purchase a copy online that was advertised as “used, but in excellent condition”—and indeed, it is. When it arrived, I immediately noticed that the genuine leather cover was pristine, the gilded edges of the pages unworn, and

the ribbon tucked in just as one would expect of a brand new Bible out of the original box.

What I found next made me sad. I opened it to the “presentation” page which read, “This Holy Bible presented to Kimberly by Mom and Dad, December 1983.” Clearly, loving parents had given this Bible to their daughter, but it remained unread in the intervening 30+ years. Kimberly’s parents had given her what could have been her most valuable possession in the world, but it appears that she received no benefit from it. I suppose it’s possible that Kimberly already had her own Bible and—like me—just preferred a different edition. We can only hope!

If my worst fears are true, Kimberly’s failure to use the gift her parents gave her is not unlike Esau who “despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). Esau’s decision to trade something as valuable as his birthright changed the whole course of his life, which an inspired New Testament writer described as “profane” (Heb. 12:16). Esau “found no place for repentance” (v.17), but we can only hope that such is not the case with Kimberly.

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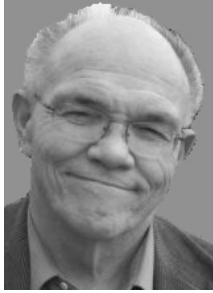
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DAVE GIRARDOT

By **KARL DIESTELKAMP**

We mourn the death of a Christian, a fellow laborer in the kingdom of Christ, a gospel preacher, and my friend and brother. The loss of association is ours to bear; he has finished his course and departed from this world into the care and keeping of Almighty God to await the resurrection.



Dave Girardot was born October 6, 1943, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and died February 12, 2016. Early in the 1970's, Dave was having some concerns about the Roman Catholic doctrine in which he had been raised when he met Clifford Sheffield, a gospel preacher. Sheffield referred him to me since Dave and his wife lived in West Allis, Wisconsin. Dave and I began to study the Bible together, and it was immediately apparent that he was eager to find the truth he had missed out on in his upbringing. It wasn't long until his wife Annette joined our studies around their kitchen table. After a number of studies he obeyed the gospel. Annette was also baptized into Christ a short time later. They were members of the West Allis church, and from that time forward they were a team to teach the gospel and to be examples to others. Six months after Dave obeyed the gospel, my wife and I moved from Milwaukee to Kenosha but kept in touch with the Girardots.

At that time, the West Allis church experienced a series of trials which included being without a preacher part of the time and the losing members who moved away or chose to worship with other congregations. Two years after obeying the gospel, Dave Girardot began working full time with the West Allis church. He faithfully continued this work for forty years until just prior to his death.

Dave's Catholic background did nothing to prepare him for this work; but he prepared himself by diligent study of his Bible. He was determined only to teach and stand for that for which he could give scripture. He possessed an excellent recall of what he learned and had the ability to cut through discussion of some position being advocated to focus on a critical point someone was missing or had overlooked.

Dave did not seek the limelight but patiently did the work of an evangelist. Over time he became well known throughout Wisconsin and the upper Midwest and was appreciated for his humble, kind, and thoughtful manner of life. He was easy to

get to know, easy to get along with, and easy to talk to; he had a strong sense of compassion for lost souls. He travelled out of the country to preach in Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Jamaica, Turkey, The Netherlands, China, and last of all, Tanzania in eastern Africa.

Being a man with strong faith and convictions, Dave was not a "rubber stamp" for anyone. If someone questioned or challenged him, he would state his position, giving scripture, and then ask his challenger, "Where does the Bible authorize what you are teaching and practicing?" He and I travelled together a lot in efforts to establish churches or encourage new congregations. Altogether, over the years, we urged for and planned for ten different "unity meetings" among divided brethren. I knew when we discussed a point of scripture that

Dave would give it his "best shot" with a straight, reasoned, thoughtful response.

Stricken with rapidly-spreading pancreatic cancer did not lessen his faith or dim his desire to share the gospel and his confident hope. On the day of his first surgery for cancer, a doctor spelled out in graphic detail the dangers, possible complications, uncertainty of success, and its consequences. Dave's response was, "Whatever happens, I'm okay." Some of us heard him express this three times. That is "hope." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," (Psa. 116:15).

He is missed by his faithful wife Annette who not only was at his side throughout their life together but was his dedicated caregiver right up to the end, by his children, grandchildren, and by a host of us who counted him our fellow worker in the kingdom, our brother in Christ, and our true friend.

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Articles From the Days Gone By PREDESTINATION

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

Some people think, "What will be, will be." By this they mean that God has predestined what will happen in our lives. For instance, some say, "I'll not die until my time comes," meaning that God has set a date and time for each person's death. However, the Bible does not teach a doctrine like that. In fact, it teaches the very opposite.

"The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years..." (Psa. 90:10). Notice that seventy years was given as a typical lifespan, but if one is stronger he could expect to live another ten years. A definite date is not set by God.

Solomon wrote that "time and chance happen to them all" (Eccl. 9:11). In other words, various circumstances affect length of life. A decree from God has not been made. We may do various things to alter the length of our lives. Many proverbs advise wisdom, but if everything is already predetermined there is no purpose at all in attaining wisdom.

God may providentially guide our lives and He will hear our prayers, but He leaves much of life entirely in our hands to do with it as we will. He grants every advantage, and all opportunities are ours because of His goodness, but life on this earth is still what we make it. It is up to us to choose the Lord's way.

Some people think that God has chosen certain people to be saved, and others to be lost. Actually, the Lord has indeed foreor-

dated that only the obedient will be saved. Furthermore, He has predestined that all the obedient will be saved. This is the extent of the doctrine of predestination as taught in the Bible.

The apostle Paul refers to some who were predestined to adoption into the family of God (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5). He has also said "God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel..." (2 Thess. 2:13-14). From these passages we can see that those who are chosen by God are the ones who are called by the gospel, who believe it, and are thus sanctified by the Spirit.

God does not pick out certain individuals to save regardless of their condition. He receives all who come to Him through obedience to truth. That is, He saves those who hear the gospel, believe it and become obedient so that they may be pardoned.

Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Of course, no one will be baptized properly unless he first hears the gospel and believes it.

Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Ac. 2:38). Peter also urged diligence "to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:9). Yes, salvation is a gift of God, but salvation is also conditional. It is for the obedient. God has predestined that He will surely save those who hear His call through the gospel, believe and submit to it.

This article first appeared in the Aurora Bulletin, February, 1965

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE WORD

By **MATT HENNECKE**

The Word of God is an amazing, life-changing tool. Consider for a moment the apostle Paul. When we are first introduced to him, he is described as “young” (Ac. 7:58). His youth may have contributed to what seems to be a certain cockiness. He seems to have been a self-assured young man who seemingly “knew it all.” It is not unusual for young men (and women, too, I guess) to see everything as black and white, right and wrong. Paul (or Saul as he was then called) was certain that Christianity—like Christ—had to be eliminated. Acts 9:1-2 reveals Saul was obsessed with threats and murder: Self-assured. Cocky. A know-it-all. And flat out wrong.

As he journeyed to Damascus, he had his first dose of humility. A light and a voice cast doubt where before there had been none. For three days he ate and drank nothing. His journey of humility had begun. He was baptized into the very Body which he had sought to destroy. Talk about eating crow. Imagine the shame and the dawning realization of just how wrong he had been.

But Paul’s journey of humility had only begun. His own writings reveal the transformative power of the Word. The Word is amazing, for it first convicts us and then lifts us. Paul’s transformation—indeed, his journey of humility—is seen in his writings. Note the progression: In 1 Corinthians, 15:9, written about 56 AD, he calls himself the “least of the apostles.” This

was still an elite group of men. The least of twelve is still pretty good company. It would almost be like saying, I’m the least of the Super Bowl champion team.” But, then note what he writes five years later in Ephesians 3:8. He says he is “the very least of all saints.” The circle of comparison has gotten larger—much larger—but is still comprised of a minority. Then two years later he writes, “Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim 1:15).

In his own words, we learn that Paul has been completely humbled. How did this journey of humility come to be? By exposure to the Word. By the constant contact with the inspired Word, Paul was changed. If we will let it. Such is the transforming power of the Word. Paul was transformed

Paul’s Journey of HUMILITY

“I am the least of the apostles...” - 1 Cor. 15:9 **56 AD**

“to me, the very least of all saints, grace was given...” - Eph. 3:8 **61 AD**

“...Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.” - 1 Tim. 1:15 **63 AD**

by the Word and the Word will transform us so that we will have our high self-opinion replaced with total gratitude for Jesus Christ; and thus humbled we will become, as Paul did, vessels of service to our Lord.

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‘IN CASE OF A TIE’

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

Brother Yater Tant once reported that in a Bible class the teacher asked if anyone could explain why Paul was chosen to be an apostle when there were an even dozen men (counting Matthias) filling that office. After thoughtful deliberation, one brother (an older man and longtime member) opined that it was probably so there would be an uneven number, and Paul could break the deadlock “in case of a tie.” Brother Tant wondered if such a brother had adequate mental capacity to be accountable before God.

It reminds me of how some brethren are reluctant (and sometimes refuse) to appoint

elders in a congregation when there are two men who qualify—unless a third is found “in case of a tie.” This attitude is likely an outgrowth of church business meetings patterned after *Robert’s Rules of Order* instead of applying principles found in the Bible. God never intended for a church to function by majority rule.

Qualified elders will come to a consensus and make no decisions strictly on how many favor something. In congregations lacking elders, the same attitude ought to exist—consensus ought to take place. Of course, when referring to congregational decisions, we are referring to those which have not already been made by the Lord as revealed in the New Testament.

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