

*A Christian is
one who makes it
easier for others
to believe in God*



Philippians 4:8

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The Solution to Mankind's Problem

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

Just as surely as mankind's problem of sin is identified from the beginning, so is the hope of overcoming the problem. If life were without purpose and hope, there would be no purpose in identifying sin as a problem. Problems are identified and presented not so as to frustrate and cause despair and hopelessness but in order to identify and present solutions. Scripture is not needed to identify sin and its fate if there is nothing to be done about it. Thus, by its very existence, Scripture's purpose is not only to identify sin and heap guilt and shame upon mankind but also to reveal a solution to the problem.

From the beginning, God has offered this hope despite our sin. While the end result of sin is death, a solution to overcoming sin and death is implied by the fact that we are made acutely aware of the problem by both revelation and experience.

God is not the creator of problems; He is the creator of solutions to problems. Having been created in His image, we, too, are capable of solving problems of both the physical and the metaphysical. Indeed, there is within human nature a capacity for contemplating nature and that which is beyond the realm of the natural. While some might attribute this to ignorance, it is more reasonable to suggest that such attributes as faith, hope, and love are not illusions of the over-active imaginations of ignorant, accidentally-evolved, higher animals but spring from realities which transcend nature and which mankind has been purposefully given the ability to comprehend to some degree.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, they immediately became aware that there was a problem and set about to solve the problem; "they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves

together and made themselves coverings" (Gen. 3:7). That the problem of nakedness and its shame was not easily solved by some natural means is made evident by the fact that Adam and Eve still sought to hide themselves from God (vs. 8). That only God, by His grace, could solve the problem of Adam and Eve's own making is made evident when He clothed them with that which adequately covered the shame of their nakedness.

The problem of sin is evident. We see that evil is real even though it is not subject to testing by the scientific method. We have a problem that cannot be solved by natural means. Yet, even in the midst of the curses that accompanied the first sin, we find the first promise of the hope of overcoming. Life would go on, and, in time, the Seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent (vv. 14,15).

It is not by chance that Scripture virtually begins and ends by addressing the problem of sin unto death while providing the solution of salvation unto life. Like bookends in the library of Scripture, compiled over 1500 years, are the announcements of the defeat of our common enemy. These texts, and all in between them, provide the hope needed to endure the trials of this life while seeking the salvation solution that God graciously offers to the problem of sin. In Genesis 3:15, a glimmer of hope is dimly seen as "the serpent" is told that the Seed of woman would eventually bruise his head. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, this promise is finally fulfilled as "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan...who accused [brethren] before our God day and night, has been cast down" (Rev. 12:9,10).

As the apostle Paul wrote, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under [the

curse of] the law" (Gal. 4:4,5; cf. 3:13). Quoting from Deuteronomy (27:26), Paul had reminded "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them" (Gal. 3:10). This is equivalent to, "in the day that you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

So, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). A virgin woman conceived a Son by the Holy Spirit and He was named "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:18-23). "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). In so doing, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree') (Gal. 3:13). He became accursed for us "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (vs. 14; cf. Gen. 12:3). This is "the gospel which [Paul] preached...which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved...that Christ died for our sins...was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The end (result) of the problem of sin is death, but the end (demise) of the problem of sin is found in Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and His own subsequent conquest of death in His resurrection from the dead. The beginning of the solution is found in God's loving and gracious promise. Jesus is the solution to the problem of sin. The end (result) of the solution is the salvation of all who entrust and commit their souls to their Creator through Jesus Christ.

233 E. Indiana Ave., Pontiac, Illinois 61764
e-mail: andydiestelkamp@gmail.com

Who Is My Brother or Sister in Christ?

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The questions posed beg an answer to the question, “who is my brother or sister in Christ?” The recent trend in churches abandoning mainline denominational ties in favor of the community church concept has fostered this question in the minds of some. Many evangelical churches are changing their signs to remove or obscure any denomination affiliation and may even claim to be “non-denominational.” This may sound like progress to us who for years have been pleading the case for non-denominational Christianity, but these churches are actually “inter-denominational,” extending fellowship to people from various denominations.

The words “brother” and “brethren” can have a variety of applications depending on the context, but in all cases they denote some kind of relationship. If referring to

Editor’s Note: This article is in answer to a request from a reader who wants to know what, if any, relationship God’s people share with “denominational brethren” (her term) as well as those who are “slightly or very digressive.” Specifically, she wants to know what to call them (i.e., “erring brethren.”), especially if they take the name of Christ.

family relationship, calling one a “brother” is usually a reference to a male sibling. The words “brethren” and “brotherhood” are also used in a broader sense to refer to people (male and female) who share a common bond (i.e., “brethren in arms”).

Sometimes the word “brother” is used to denote a common national, racial, or ethnic likeness. It was in this sense that Ananias of Damascus addressed his fellow Jew as “Brother Saul” (Ac. 22:13) even before he told him to “wash away his sins” (22:16). There is even what is called the “brother-

hood of man,” recognizing that all humans have a common ancestry. Thus there is a sense in which we are all brothers through the line of Adam and Eve. It is in that sense that Jesus taught “whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matt. 5:22).

When speaking of spiritual relations, my brother is one who, like me, has been “born again...through the word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23)—one who through faith has been “baptized into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) and is part of God’s family. For that reason, I don’t refer to or address my sectarian friends as brothers. I call them my friends, but I don’t call them my brethren. If they are part of a denomination, one of two things is true: 1) They are not brethren, or 2) They are in the wrong place by being in a denomination. Either way, I can have no spiritual relationship with them.

Our sister also asked about how we should address or refer to those who are “slightly or very digressive.” If one among us is caught up in sin, those who are spiritual are to “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). When one “wanders from the truth” he needs to be turned back in order to “save a soul from death” (Jas. 5:19-20). If a brother “walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received” (2 Thess. 3:6) he is to be withdrawn from. Yet we are told to “not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (3:15).

When it comes to those we think of as “erring brethren,” we might want to remember that we all fit into that category to one degree or another. Restoring ourselves to the pattern of New Testament Christianity is an ongoing process and, individually, it is a lifelong process (cp. Phil. 4:12-14). We must not fool ourselves into thinking we have arrived at perfection. Therefore, those who though faith and obedience have accepted God’s grace are my brethren even through we have doctrinal differences which prevent us from having an optimal working relationship.

This is not to minimize the importance of doctrinal purity or to ignore what we believe is error in teaching or practice. We must strive to remain true to God’s word even if many of our brethren do not. When division exists among brethren it ought to be something all parties desire to remedy. This requires that we view each other as brethren and maintain a willingness to communicate (including study) with each other.

Our “sincere love of the brethren” (1 Pet. 1:22) should motivate us to “be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (1 Pet. 3:8).

TO ‘SEE GOD’

By STEVE FONTENOT

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). All men, whether pure in heart or not, will eventually “see” God: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). Obviously, this is not what Jesus meant in His sermon by “see God.”

This promise was made in the context of “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). How “good” the “news” (“gospel”) is of a coming “kingdom” depends on the King of that kingdom. This “kingdom” would be the “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God” and He would enthrone His own anointed King, the Messiah, to rule over it. With this in view, no wonder one is “blessed” when “theirs is the [i.e., the blessings of, metonymy] kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3,10)!

But not everyone has the privilege to see a great king. Not just anyone is allowed in his presence. The Jews, familiar with kingdoms in their history, understood this. When Absalom was in disfavor with King David, “the king said, ‘Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face’” (2 Sam. 14:24). Esther feared to “go in to the king,” for “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless

the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live” (Est. 4:11).

In contrast, the wise men who were “closest” (NKJV) to King Ahasuerus and whom he consulted as trusted advisers were ones who “saw the king’s face” (Est. 1:14). When David composed his song about finding refuge in the LORD, he said, “the LORD’s throne [note the idea of “King”] is in heaven...He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face” (Psa. 11:1,4,7). The sons of Korah express their desire for God’s favor: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Psa. 42:2; cp. Rev. 22:4).

To “see God” then is to be “close” to Him, to enjoy His favor, and to be a “blessed” participant in the rule of the Messiah and the “kingdom of heaven.”

Now that’s “gospel”! If one is “pure in heart,” he can “see God”! You do not have to be rich; you do not have to travel to Jerusalem; you do not have to do “penance” such as starving yourself or cutting yourself or in some other way treating your body severely; you do not have to depend on the graces of the hierarchy of a church; you do not need to consult a guru; you do not have to be powerful or be a noble; you do not even have to know rich, powerful, or noble men. You simply must be “pure in heart”!

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!” How much do *you* want to “see God”?

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



Qualities of a Strong Church

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

The Lord's church was purchased at a very high price. "He gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). The mission of this church is very great indeed. It is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Therefore, it is important that all Christians be fully aware of their responsibility to make the church just as strong as possible. We must not fail to realize that the strength of the church depends upon us—not upon God. He did His part and did it perfectly. Any weakness that may come upon the church is strictly a human weakness.

There are two primary qualities that must always be possessed if a local church is to be strong. First there must be *purity* and *peace* before other attributes may even be considered. Regardless of what others may find to be important or even necessary, these two are foundation qualities to be possessed before and above all others.

Brethren must be united—not simply in passive tranquility which allows them to worship together peacefully but in aggressive activity that binds them together in real service to God and to man. Yet, while fully united in action, we must engage in that which is true and pure in God's sight. James said, "...first pure, then peaceable" (Jas. 3:17). If a church is truly possessed with unity and purity, it is well on the road to success and strength; and *then* we will also see some other qualities.

A strong church is always filled with love within. It is said of the Christians who lived in the first century that an observer remarked, "See how they love one another." Peter said, "see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:23). This love will not be manifested in mere lip service but in devoted affection, concern, and care for one another.

A strong church will demonstrate love for truth. This will be more than a negative approach. We will not simply avoid and oppose false doctrine, but we will enthusiastically uphold and defend truth. In other words, strength manifests itself not only in defense against evil but also in positive, forward action. If people do much good but fail to oppose error, the false doctrine and unscriptural activity will inevitably come into their lives and religion. But if people oppose error diligently and fail to fill their lives with good deeds, then they will possess and empty religion quite worthless to God and man. True love for truth will cause us to fight error and, at the same time, uphold truth before the world.

A strong church will love people—all people. Without such love enthusiastically

manifested the church will be selfish, unconcerned, and indifferent to human needs both in the physical and spiritual realms. Fervent love for all lost souls will motivate God's people to *urgency* in activity that will not be restrained by disappointments nor diminished by difficulties. This kind of love will make each Christian a real worker in Christ's vineyard and will enable each congregation to become an effective pillar for upholding and spreading the truth.

When Christians really learn to love all mankind we will cease to be mere "reservists" and will become active "combatants" in God's army, fighting for

the souls of men. When we are motivated more by love and not simply by duty, when we learn to equate responsibility with opportunity, and when we look upon service to God and to mankind as a *privilege* and not just an obligation, then life will be much more satisfactory for us and more fruitful before God.

Let us "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21), and "be not weary in well doing" (2 Thess. 3:13). With God as our helper, and unity, purity, and love characterized in our action, weakness will be overcome and strength will manifest itself in victories.

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VALUE

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture calculates the average cost of raising a child born in 2013 to a middle-income family in the U.S from birth to age 18 is approximately \$245,340. Although I'm sure there are thrifty ways to reduce that number, I'm equally sure sticker shock causes many not to view and value children as a welcome "gift of the Lord" (Psa. 127:3). A "quiver" full of them? (Psa. 127:5)—I don't think so.

Valuing things from a primarily financial bottom line perverts our sense of worth. This is a temptation of capitalism and a failure of materialism. The gift of modern suburban children is eroded by thoughts of the standard of living and luxury we could have without them. The worth of the wisdom of the elderly is degraded by the cost of their care. Giving on the first day of the week to the Lord is viewed as a budget drain. Preaching truth which brings shrinkage in attendance (and therefore in contribution) is spurned. And the poor are seen as a blight on prosperity. Simply put, not everything can be measured monetarily. We must look beyond whether something is a credit or debit to our bank accounts to see its God-given intrinsic value.

The world is not going to value the things of God

"Do not love the world or the things in the world...For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16). Remember this every time the TV commercial equates success

with possessions or accomplishment with retirement accounts. And don't be surprised when the world devalues what God values. Jesus is the prime example—rejected by men, but precious in the sight of God (1 Pet. 2:4-7). Don't let the world decide what is worthwhile in life.

Find what God values and value that

Watch for it as you study God's word: "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels" (Prov. 31:10). The elderly are an honorable asset (1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 16:31). Elders are worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). Children, including the unborn, are a gift formed by God Himself (Psa. 139:13-16; 127:3; Prov. 17:6; Mk. 10:14). One lost person is worth all the effort (Matt. 18:12-14). The pure word of God is perfect and enlightening (Psa. 19:7-11). Those who spread the gospel bring glad tidings (Rom. 10:15). The poor bless us with opportunities to give and serve (Prov. 19:17; 1 Jn. 3:17-18; Eph. 4:28). Jesus is precious (1 Pet. 2:4-7). Justice, mercy, patience, wisdom, truth... watch for them. Scripture is filled with what God values so we will value it too.

How?

1) Fill your mind with what God values (Phil. 4:8-9). 2) Remember that physical stuff is temporary (1 Jn. 2:17). 3) Change your mind *and* actions to show value for what is "very precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3:4). 4) Make going to heaven what you value—your only true treasure (Matt. 6:19-21).

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

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When the postal service first began to push tabbing, I vowed that when they enforced compliance it would mean the end of the mailed-out edition of the paper. I determined it would be too labor-intensive to address and then place tabs on each piece. Besides that, I hate tabs! Despite my hatred, I have located a local mailing service which has offered to tab the pieces for me at a reasonable price, and so we press on, at least for now.

~Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

AL DIESTELKAMP, *Editor*
260 N. Aspen Drive,
Cortland, IL 60112 • (815) 756-9840
e-mail: aldiestel@gmail.com
Web Page: www.thinkonthesethings.com

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Left-Handed Compliment

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Years ago, when I was still climbing ladders, I fell off of one, and, in an attempt to break my fall, I sprained my left wrist. Being right-handed, I guess I had taken my left hand for granted, but this injury educated me as to how much I use my left hand. I found that my left hand does many things to make my right hand more useful. Without the left hand, even tying my shoe was a chore. I even found that there are a few things my left hand is able to do better than my right hand.

Some people are like my left hand. They may not be as dominant as others, but they are still important. A man named Hur never gained fame or had the abilities of Moses, but he did his part to make Moses’ job possible (Ex. 17:12). Likewise, there are no unimportant members in the body of Christ—or in a local congregation.

Even little things add up to much. Sometimes just “being there” is of value. You may think, “I won’t be missed.” Think again! Consider Job’s friends who, though they had their faults, sat in silence with Job for a whole week during his time of distress (Job 2:11-13).

The Bible is filled with examples of people who were unsung heroes. Did you ever wonder why we don’t read of Lazarus as a bold apostle or eloquent preacher? He served his purpose by being a friend—and Jesus loved him for it (Jn. 11:35-36). Simon of Cyrene is known only for quietly bearing the cross for Jesus (Matt. 27:32). Kind of like me and my left hand, the apostle Paul did not fully appreciate John Mark until he had to work without him (see Ac. 15:36-41; 2 Tim. 4:9-11).

Some people who played supporting roles used their experiences as preparation for even greater service. Joseph started as a slave and ended up as governor of Egypt, allowing him to serve the brothers who earlier considered him useless. David worked as a shepherd before he defeated the giant, and faithfully served the king he would later replace.

Anyone who “can see through a ladder” can see that it doesn’t take much of a man or woman to please God, but it takes every bit of him or her. Do what you can. If you do, you will be sure to please the Lord who honored a woman who “did what she could” by anointing His head with oil (Mk. 14:1-9).

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