

"But you will be called  
the priests of the Lord;  
You will be spoken of  
as ministers of our  
God."

~ISAIAH 61:6 [NASB]

# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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## Priests of God Today

By **RICK LIGGIN**

In the book of Malachi, God voices several complaints against the nation of Israel. All were dishonoring Him to some degree, but the Levite priests were the chief offenders (Mal. 1:6 – 2:9). As Israel's spiritual leaders, they were the ones most responsible for this godless irreverence among the people.

There were at least two major ways in which the priests had led the people to dishonor God: 1) they had come to see the sacrificing of animals as a "tiresome" task and were, therefore, defiling God's altar with inferior offerings (1:8-14); and 2) they were not living up to the moral standard set for them by God and thereby had lost the respect of those they taught (2:1-9).

In this second section, God tells them that "the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi... So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people..." (2:7-9).

Notice that from God's perspective, a priest is supposed to "preserve knowledge" so that men will seek him out for the instruction he can offer. To "preserve knowledge" is more than just keeping track of God's message and faithfully relating it to others. It includes one's living up to that message himself. The priest who does not live up to the message of God is not really *preserving knowledge* at all, even though his verbal teaching may be exactly in keeping with what God has said! It is only when a priest truly *preserves knowledge* that others will seek him out to receive his instruction.

*"But you are a chosen race,  
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for God's own possession,  
so that you may proclaim the  
excellencies of Him who has  
called you out of darkness into  
His marvelous light"*

~2 PETER 2:9 [NASB]

### Some Applications for Today

Now, I'm fully aware of the fact that under the new covenant we no longer have priests from the tribe of Levi; but can't we, at least in principle, make some kind of application to us in this dispensation? I believe we can! As a gospel preacher, I almost immediately see how this principle applies to those of us who preach and teach God's Word today. We are obligated to live in such a way as to command the respect of people so that they will *want* our instruction. People generally do not respect or want to be taught by someone who is a hypocrite or whose own life is inconsistent with what he teaches. If I want folks to respect me enough to listen to what I teach, then I'd better give attention to the message myself and make sure that "I practice what I preach." I feel certain that this is what Paul had in mind when he urged young Timothy to "pay close attention to *yourself* and to your teaching..." (1 Tim. 4:16).

But this principle doesn't just apply to the preachers and Bible class teachers among us. The truth is that under the new covenant *every* Christian is a priest! Together, we form a "holy" and "royal

priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9) and, as such, each one of us is "able to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). And since this is the case, the point God made to the priests of Israel is applicable to every one of us as priests today! We are under obligation as priests to "preserve knowledge"—to live in such a way as to command the respect of a lost world so that they will come to us for teaching and instruction!

### Some Conclusions to Consider

You need to understand something. Now that you're a Christian, you're not a "nobody" anymore! You are "somebody" now. You're a *priest*! And though this brings with it great blessings and benefits, it also brings with it an obligation to be holy in all your ways! Why? Because some in this lost world are looking! They are looking for someone to guide them in the way that leads to life. And they will only listen to us as the messengers of God if our lives reflect a holiness that is consistent with what we teach as priests of God.

Don't be like the priests of Old Testament Israel who dishonored God by not living up to the moral standard He set for them. Rather, let's be sure to honor God by being holy in all our conduct and behavior (1 Pet. 1:15). Maybe then we can reach a lost and dying world with the saving message of Christ. There is probably no time—in my lifetime, anyway—when we as God's people (in America, at least) have needed more to hear this message and answer the call to true holiness as priests of God. I fear we are losing our distinctiveness to a worldly culture that is tempting us to conform to its standards. Please, brothers and sisters, let's all remember who we are!

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# PATIENCE IN DISCIPLINE

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

As a grandparent, it is interesting to watch my children discipline my grandchildren. Indeed, there is always discomfort for all parties—the disciplined, the discipliners, and the witnesses—whenever any kind of corrective or punitive discipline is taking place. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness by those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

It is with this perspective that we grandparents ought to encourage our children to discipline our grandchildren. I am pleased to see my children doing this because I know that it will produce good spiritual fruit in the long run. The “long run” is one of the difficult parts of discipline. One of the reasons we shy away from discipline in any realm is because its effects are often not immediately obvious and the lag time between the discipline and its fruits is often when the skeptics and opponents of discipline will be critical. Yet, those who trust in God and His wisdom and teaching still discipline in faith. This demands patience, endurance, and diligence.

Of course, the purpose of discipline is to bring about a change of heart and not merely a change of action. The immature behaviors of children are understandable and sometimes even cute; but—without discipline—what was cute at 18 months looks pretty pathetic if not downright ugly at 18 years old. To form children into the image of God requires parents to raise them in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). A failure to do this sets a child up for failure in his relationship with his Creator.

As Christians we are obligated to discipline one another, and this requires patience as well. However, let us not interpret patience to be something passive. The reality is that, in any group of people, there will be people ranging from strong to weak and at different levels of growth and maturity in between. Paul wrote, “Now we exhort you brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all” (1 Thess. 5:14). Similarly, the Hebrews author wrote, “Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:12,13). Of course, this kind of patient

strengthening is not accomplished by physical means but through a steady dose of spiritual nourishment in the form of teaching, edification, and correction. These are only accomplished through communion and fellowship with one another is enjoined upon us who claim to have a relationship with God. God is not mocked. He can see right through the deception of claiming to have a relationship with Him while not having a relationship with His people (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20).

When we avoid having relationships with one another, it is often because we do not appreciate being challenged to grow closer to God. It is the duty of Christians to hold one another accountable to the confession we have made concerning Jesus Christ being our Lord and Savior (cf. 1 Tim. 6:12,13; Heb. 4:14; 10:23). We have all been called to work in the kingdom of our Lord; and if that work is being neglected or avoided, then we are right to identify the problem and call one another back to doing what we have been called to do.

Shepherds have the responsibility to watch out for the souls in the flock. God gave this responsibility to men even though He knew that no man would be perfect in the performance of this role. To the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul wrote, “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27) with the implication that they were to do likewise. “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (vs. 28). He further admonished them, “Therefore watch” (vs. 31). The apostle Peter admonished similarly (1 Pet. 5:2).

Many church-going people in the world do not appreciate, let alone submit to, such spiritual shepherding, but this does not have any bearing on what Jesus and His apostles and prophets taught. Truth is, many call Jesus “Lord” but do not appreciate or submit to Him as Lord. Each saint should desire spiritual shepherding, not only for leading the congregation as a group, but for promoting individual growth in Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). Note Hebrews 13:17. Do you want overseers being watchful, instructive, challenging, and corrective, or not? The charge given to elders is like unto what Ezekiel revealed (Ezek. 33:8-11). It is not the prerogative of shepherds to watch sheep wander away from the flock without making an

effort to bring them back into the fold. So, while we *must* exhibit love and patience, we must understand those words to include all that is encompassed in the role of shepherding and hold one another accountable to our common confession.

The “one another” texts in Scripture are numerous, and they call upon us to motivate one another (Heb. 10:24), bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), teach and admonish one another (Eph. 5:19), remember Christ’s sacrifice with one another (1 Cor. 11:33), and confess our sins to one another (Jas. 5:16). When brethren turn away from being a part of these “one another” activities, they do so to their own harm and the harm of those over whom they have influence. Inevitably they become spiritually weaker and compound the negative effects of their poor examples. The refusal to communicate in any meaningful way and/or take spiritual counsel is detrimental and discouraging to all involved. Thus, as patience must be exercised, patient application of spiritual principles requires us to keep moving forward in all of our efforts, and this includes in discipline.

Love and discipline are compatible, and to suggest that they are incompatible is to have forgotten what Scripture teaches (Heb. 12:5-10). Jesus both loves and disciplines (Rev. 3:19), and He calls upon parents and brethren to do the same. Christians should desire discipline from one another. Indeed, Paul patiently persisted in his discipline of brethren to the end of causing *godly* sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-12). Thus all the discipline (instruction, correction, warning, rebuking, and even withdrawing of fellowship) is not (and must not be) motivated by any kind of hatred or meanness. It is done out of sincere concern for the one being disciplined in the hopes that he/she may, even yet, repent and grow in the Lord (Rom. 2:4; 1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Pet. 3:9).

Are parents and elders perfect in their discipline? Not at all, but we must not allow this to keep us from acting as God has called us to do. The wonderful thing about all of this is that God is always ready to forgive, and so should we be. Even when others are not faithful, God remains faithful to Who He is and the promises that He has made (2 Tim. 2:13). We need to be like our Father in Heaven and remain faithful, even to those who are unfaithful (cf. Matt. 5:45), and exercise patient discipline in love.

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# PING-PONG: A LESSON OF LIFE

By MATT HENNECKE

I used to think myself quite the ping pong player. My skill level was sufficient to decimate most of my family members. My brother-in-law was my only real competition, and, though he would deny it, I won many more of our battles than I lost.

My favorite opponent was my young nephew Andy. He was always ready to play, and played with total, reckless abandon. His skills fell far short of my own. I was a “spin” master. I could put such “English” on the ball that, when it landed on Andy’s side of the table, it would bounce crazily in an unanticipated direction. I took great glee in running Andy into the half-filled cardboard boxes lining the basement wall as he dove vainly to return one of my crazy, spinning shots. He’d collapse into the boxes but always came up wanting more. Time and again I laughed uproariously as his contorted body lay sprawled across the boxes after I’d hit one of my spectacular shots.

When I went off to college, I enjoyed taking on new opponents and showing them my “stuff.” I honed my skills and relished taking on new opponents who’d never seen ping pong balls bounce at such weird and awkward angles. I was good—no doubt about it. And I was full of myself.

When I was about twenty years old, a couple became members of our local congregation. The young husband (we’ll call him Jay) was in his thirties and possessed many talents. He could play the piano beautifully. He was a great Bible teacher, and he could make friends easily because of his engaging social skills. As the summer progressed, I came to know him better. I also learned he thought himself a pretty good ping pong player. I still remember thinking, “Ah, fresh meat,” but I purposefully kept my interest in the game hidden, waiting for the perfect moment to “show” him what a real ping pong player could do.

Judgment day presented itself one day in early August when Jay and I and several other people from church happened to be at a member’s home for a potluck. The homeowner had a ping pong table in the basement. I remember thinking the time had come to reveal my skills and slay yet another victim. “Hey, want to play some ping pong?” I not-so-innocently asked as Jay and I found ourselves in the basement after eating. Those who knew me from church realized I was circling my prey and watched with amusement as Jay took the bait. “Sure, let’s play,” he replied.

*Oh, somewhere in this favored land  
the sun is shining bright;  
The band is playing somewhere,  
and somewhere hearts are light,  
And somewhere men are laughing,  
and little children shout;  
But there was no joy for me that day—  
I ingloriously lost the bout.*

~Adapted from “Casey At the Bat,”  
by Ernest Thayer

I lost 21 to 0. Yes, zero. I never scored a point. I never even came close to scoring a point.

A life lesson took root and bloomed that day: the lesson of humility. Of course I’d been humbled before, but never so profoundly and in the presence of so many witnesses. That day I realized I had been naively comparing my skills to others who were far less skilled than I. Clearly there were others who far exceeded me in ping pong prowess. “Pride goeth before a fall,” echoed the words of the Proverb writer (Prov. 16:18). That day I fell hard. Jay cleaned my clock and, in so doing, taught me about pride: Pride made me cocky. It made me feel invincible and self-reliant. But the lesson of humility wasn’t yet over. Two weeks later, Jay—who had so soundly thrashed me—entered a ping pong tournament in downtown Chicago and lost to a seven-year-old boy. And he lost badly.

Imagine how I felt. Not only wasn’t I skilled, but I was light-years behind some nameless seven-year-old.

Such are the lessons of life. They often come along and slap us upside the head; and, if we let them, they shape us, mold us, and change us—for the better. So it is when it comes to spiritual matters. Perhaps because of that ping pong lesson I’m inclined to listen to Paul’s spiritual advice when he says we shouldn’t “dare to classify or compare ourselves with others” and that when others “measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding” (2 Cor. 10:12). He also tells us “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). The conclusion is pretty clear: I’m imperfect; I’m a sinner; and I’d be doomed except for Jesus Christ. I shouldn’t think myself better than anyone. Want a dose of humility? Compare yourself to Christ.

Over the years I’ve learned I’m not very good at ping pong, and sadly I’m not very good at righteousness. But He is: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Without Him, I’m nothing. Only He is perfect. Only He can save.

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## A TALK AT THE TABLE

# PROCLAIMING THE LORD’S DEATH

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Shortly before His death on the cross, Jesus instituted the only ritual to be observed in worship by His followers. The apostle Paul indicated that by partaking of this memorial we would be proclaiming the Lord’s death till He comes (1 Cor. 11:26).

Before we do this today, let’s notice some ways His death was “proclaimed” during His crucifixion and immediately after His death:

- Pilate, after declaring Jesus “Not guilty,” turned him over to the mob but unwittingly lent his testimony by posting a sign saying, “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews” (noted by all four gospel writers).
- Luke is the only one who tells of a thief who, dying along with Jesus on an adjacent cross, testified by asking to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom.
- Mark and Luke relate that, as Jesus’ life was slipping away on the cross, the sun which Jesus had created refused to shine for three hours.
- Matthew, Mark, and John tell how the veil of the temple was torn in two. One account indicated the tear was “from top to bottom.” The barrier that separated man from God was no more. By His death, man has access to God through Jesus.
- An earthquake announced the Lord’s death, causing rocks to split and graves to be opened. Lo and behold, bodies of dead saints were raised to life. They went into Jerusalem where they appeared to many.
- Three of the gospel writers record the words of the centurion who declared, “Truly, this was the Son of God.”

As we partake of this memorial, we proclaim His death to the world: “Truly, this *IS* the Son of God!”



## Voluntary Partners

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I am both amazed and humbled by the response from our voluntary partners. As reported in the past issue, the need for me to be away from my printing equipment while caring for my wife (requiring it be printed commercially) has raised our costs substantially. This issue is expected to cost about \$725, and due to generous donations, we have a surplus of slightly more than \$1,400 for use in producing future issues.

# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

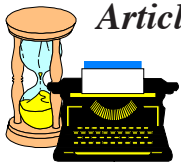
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## Articles From the Days Gone By

# SPLINTERITIS

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

If one stays in a certain locality most of the time, he may be somewhat shielded from the harsh realities of divisiveness. But when one travels much among brethren, he will become aware of many abrasive attitudes and much bickering over matters of human judgment and personal opinion. Consequently we see God's people, who may indeed be agreed on the great issues of our day, split ends splintered over the color of drapes in front of the baptistry, the manner of ventilating the building, the length of the preacher's stay in a certain place, etc.

Bad attitudes cause most of the turmoil in congregations. Some seem to have established themselves, in their own minds at least, as super-critics, testing every word, every syllable—testing them, not by Scriptures, but by their own warped sense of correctness based upon tradition or contemporary concept.

An attitude of sincere humility and of wholehearted brotherly love almost guar-

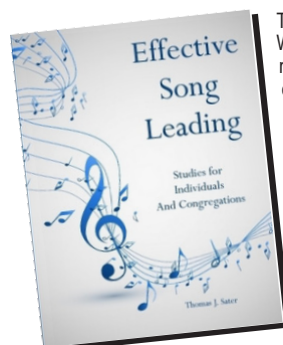
antees unity when it is accompanied by a truly discerning love for truth. Conversely, peace is not assured by love for truth alone. A dogmatic, unyielding attitude and/or a factious, bickering spirit produces strife and division even among those who want to obey God. Splinteritis is an infectious, soul destroying spiritual disease. Each Christian must yield completely to the Great Physician lest the affliction reach epidemic pro-

portions and destroy the kingdom of Christ on earth today.

It is not enough to know we follow truth in doctrinal matters and in religious practices. We must also manifest the spirit of brotherly love and an attitude of compassion and patience, both of which are also absolute principles of divine truth.

*This article was first published in  
THINK, Vol. 2, No. 2, January, 1971*

## Song Leading Training and Study Book Available



TOM SATER, an accomplished song leader and elder of the church in Kenosha, Wisconsin, is the author of *Effective Song Leading*, a collection of studies and training materials designed to help individuals and congregations improve the musical aspects of their worship to God. These lessons are perfect for personal study, men's training classes, and congregational studies.

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