



THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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‘To Whom Much Is Given...’

By AL DIESTELKAMP

There are many Bible verses that comfort and assure believers. Such verses often become works of calligraphy, displayed in our homes and shared on social media sites. While there is great value in gaining comfort from select scriptures, we must not fail to remind ourselves of the many passages which warn us—and perhaps should frighten us.

One of the most challenging statements in the Bible is one that Jesus spoke to His disciples when he was teaching about service to Him: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Lk. 12:48b). That’s one Bible verse I have never seen framed and displayed on a wall.

The context of this statement is a lesson about stewardship (Lk. 12:35-48). Jesus began this lesson by emphasizing the importance of His servants being prepared (vs. 35-36). His admonition to “Let your waist be girded” is calling on us to be dressed and ready for service. Later, the apostle Paul informs us this girding of our waist is to be “with truth” (Eph. 6:14). And how can we forget Jesus’ own words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me” (Jn. 14:6)?

Along with being girded, Jesus wants our “lamps burning.” This reminds us of the psalmist’s declaration: “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). God’s Word is essential in our own walk, and—to the extent that it is producing “good works” in our lives—we let our light shine so that others may ultimately come to glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

We may wonder just who these people are about whom Jesus said “much will be required.” Obviously, Peter wondered the same thing, and asked, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people? (v. 41). In answering, Jesus

first issues comfort and assurance to the “faithful and wise steward,” followed by an urgent warning to the unfaithful (vs. 42-48a). He finally answers this question at the end of verse 48, applying it to “everyone.” At the very least, if one considers himself to be a “servant of Christ,” this teaching applies. Jesus’ implication of degrees of reward and punishment may evoke some unanswered questions in our minds, but what is unmistakable is that there is stricter judgment on those “to whom much is given.”

Jesus uses the illustration of a thief breaking into a house to illustrate the problem with apathy toward our stewardship (vs. 37-40). The steward who is always ready for to defend his master’s house will be rewarded generously. Though His teaching is in the form of a parable, the message is not subtle. Just as a thief doesn’t announce his intentions, the Lord has not announced when He will come. This behooves us to expect Him at any time.

Some Applications

God’s dealing with nations throughout history ought to make Americans tremble. Our nation and its citizens have been given much more than we deserve. The wealth and power God has granted to us requires much in return. He has blessed us with full access to His Word and liberty to worship without much interference. If a nation squanders God’s blessings, He will likely discipline it. I have to wonder just how long God will tolerate our nation as it increasingly ignores and resists His righteousness.

Local congregations blessed by the Lord above their local needs would do well to look for ways to help brethren in other locations who are in need. There may be needy saints due to unfortunate circumstances in struggling churches which lack the resources to provide adequate relief. There are also gospel preachers in

needy fields who need help from churches “to whom much is given.” The apostle Paul appealed to the Corinthian brethren to share in their abundance with the goal “that there may be equality” (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

We who are Christians should also consider this principle when called upon to forgive those who sin against us. Jesus made it abundantly clear that we who have received His forgiveness must be willing to forgive others. The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35) is plain enough, as is His direct statement (Mk. 11:25-26).

The principle also applies to *spiritual abilities* God has given us individually. Whatever level of the knowledge of the Word God has granted us demands a willingness to pass that knowledge onto others by way of evangelism and edification. God doesn’t require all to be public teachers (i.e., Jas. 3:1), but He expects us to do what we can. Parents (and especially fathers) who are Christians must personally take on the responsibility of teaching their children instead of relying solely on Bible class teachers.

Our prosperity and material possessions are gifts from God, and we should be willing to give accordingly. This applies not only to giving to the local church but also to our generosity toward those in need and other worthy causes. Our giving is to be “according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12). We are called to heart-felt, liberal giving (2 Cor. 9:6-15). One’s first-day giving is to be according to prosperity (1 Cor. 16:1-2). A question one might need to consider: If the Lord prospered me according to my giving, would I be able to live on it?

Obviously, there are other specific applications to Jesus’ warning “to whom much is given,” but it’s all about giving—giving of ourselves because of all that we have been given by the Lord.

OUR PATRIOTIC ZEAL

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

I originally wrote this article last November for our local newspaper. At that time I observed that once all of the hubbub regarding the 2018 mid-term elections was over, the various governments in our nation could get back to the business of doing what governments are supposed to do [eye-roll]. Of course, it was soon thereafter “politics as usual” in “a deeply-divided nation” with finger-pointing, blame-shifting, and political spin and posturing happened at every opportunity.

Fundamentally, this continually happens because there are major philosophical differences about what the business of government actually is. Despite this lack of national consensus, I am happy to live in a land where these philosophies can be freely debated and voted on every two to four years in relative peace. However, we are very sadly mistaken if we think that civil government, democratic or otherwise, is the solution to our problems. As the political voices get louder in anticipation of next year’s 2020 presidential election, now is an appropriate time to remind Christians of where our focus and emphasis should be.

All of mankind’s real problems are rooted in sin. Liberals, moderates, and conservatives *all* sin (Rom. 3:23). To one degree or another, they all want the freedom to continue in sinful ways while simultaneously wanting the freedom from the consequences of those sins, and *this* is impossible. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption [i.e. real problems], but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life [the overcoming of real problems]” (Gal. 6:7,8).

It is the inclination of people to imagine that the solutions to our deepest problems are within the grasp of human ingenuity, but they are not. Indeed, this is the message of Scripture. If mankind *could* solve its most pressing problems without God, then there would have been no need for God to reveal His will to us. There would have been no need for His grace. There would have been no need for the cross of Christ.

While our currency says, “In God We Trust,” it is becoming increasingly evident that this simply is not true. This is an archaic statement which possibly reflected the genuine faith of some influential forefathers, but it does not reflect the majority of Americans anymore (and likely never did). How do I know this? Because if this nation truly trusted in God, we would be

approaching our problems in fundamentally different ways. We would be trusting in God’s ways as revealed in His Word. Instead, both “evangelical conservatives” and “compassionate liberals” are hitching their hopes to politicians and their government solutions to solve our societal problems which, at their core, are actually spiritual problems.

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (Psa. 118:8,9). If we think this has no application to our presidents or senators or congressional representatives or judges, we are woefully deceived and are a part of the problem rather than the solution.

Certainly, it is right that we pray for “all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim. 2:2). It is right that we give due honor to those in authority over us (cf. Rom. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Yet, “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food” (Prov. 23:1-

3). Our present rulers are not exceptions to this warning.

It has been observed that politics makes strange bedfellows. Fellow saints, we will not solve our problems by “getting in bed” with politicians. We will solve our problems by being faithful to our God. Corruption is contagious! “If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked” (Prov. 29:12). It is not loyalty to a party or government officials which exalts a nation. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Remember, we “desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.” Whether you believe the United States of America was once great and can be great again or you believe that it remains great or has never been great, let us remember that our true citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20). Therefore, our patriotic zeal should be directed toward Heaven. So, as the next election cycle heats up, let us rise above the fray with faith and unashamedly identify ourselves with Jesus Christ as the One Who alone can solve our problems.

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

16th Annual Men’s Overnight Bible Study

The 16th Annual Men’s Overnight Bible Study will be held Friday and Saturday, September 27-28 at Illinois District Camp in Wapella, Illinois. This year’s speakers will be Jeff Smelser, of Exton, Pennsylvania; Scott Smelser, of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Rick Liggins, of Peoria, Illinois; and David Diestelkamp, of Aurora, Illinois. This year’s theme will be:

“Diligence with God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15): Practical Counsel for Studying Scripture”

JEFF SMELSER

*The Big Picture
The Value of Knowing the
Original Languages
The Value of Maps*



SCOTT SMELSER

*Ready to Give an Answer
Misuse of the
Original Languages
Online Research*



DAVID DIESTELKAMP

*Valuing Reading
Understanding Communication
Cautions in Bible Study*



RICK LIGGIN

*Practical Reading
Context and Textual Analysis
Developing a Faith of Your Own*



This event is organized by Christians in the northern and central Illinois area and is not the work of any local church. The goal of the weekend is to educate, equip, and encourage men to fill their unique roles in the kingdom of Christ. There is a \$25 per-person fee to defray the costs of the campsite and meals. Consider joining us as we learn together about the importance of diligence in handling of God’s Word.

Registration begins August 1, 2019, at www.mensstudy.org



THE CONSCIENCE

By RAY FERRIS (1923 - 2016)

If one were to take four watches, one with the right time, one an hour fast, one an hour slow, and one that is stopped, he might compare them to four types of conscience. One is by the right standard—it operates correctly; two are by wrong standards—one operates too loosely and is thus too fast, and one is too binding and is thus too slow; the fourth is by no standard at all. It just doesn't operate. Just what is the condition of your conscience?

The word is formed by a combination of two words in the original language of the New Testament one being a word that means with and the other a word which means knowledge. It thus conveys the sense of knowing with oneself. Webster says, "a knowledge or feeling of right and wrong, with a compulsion to do right; moral judgment that prohibits or opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle" (*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, p.312).

Paul writes of the conscience accusing or excusing (Rom. 2:15). Thus the conscience is that which we know within ourselves to measure up to a standard previously established in some way in our thinking. It is the built-in judge that exists in every man. If improper knowledge exists in an individual he may condemn that which is acceptable, or he may approve that which should be condemned. Study Romans 14 to see this principle illustrated.

Your Conscience

But what of your conscience? Is it one that has been formed and guided to the proper standard by God's word? Or is it one that permits you to go beyond what God would desire due to failure to concentrate on His will? It is entirely possible that it is one that of such possibility ought to motivate us to a fervent study and constant consideration of God's word.

It is also possible that one's conscience will allow that which ought not to be done with no judgment of wrongdoing. Paul said, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbles, or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he that condemns not himself in that thing which he allows" (Rom. 14:21-22).

Note that a conscience that does not condemn us in some practice does not guarantee the practice to be right. We are happy (blessed) when what is allowed does not condemn us! The Christian had best be

very careful what practices are approved in his life.

Perhaps your conscience has, in essence, ceased to function at all. We read of those who are guilty of "speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron..." (1 Tim. 4:2). We also read of people whose consciences were defiled (Tit. 1:15). These passages indicate consciences that are not working. Is it possible for that to be true of you?

Assurance or Condemnation

The conscience is a vital aspect of the Christian's effort to please God. John said, "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (1 Jn. 3:19-20). Paul wrote, "And he that doubts is damned if he eat, because he eats not in faith: for God hath received him" (Rom. 14:23).

The basis of the sin is the self-accusation of one's own conscience which condemns him as one who rebels against what he believes to be God's will. The very spirit of rebellion is something which cannot be condoned. John says God, being greater than one's heart, recognizes the rebellious spirit. It is impossible for me to expect the Lord to approve of me when I do not approve of myself.

May the Lord help us to develop a proper conscience that will restrain us from any activity that would displease God, and motivate us always to be involved in active good.

Once more we quote from the pen of Paul: "But this I confess unto thee, that af-

ter the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Ac. 24:14-16).

The Spirit-inspired apostle exercised himself (that surely implies that he worked at the task) so that his conscience would not accuse him of doing what he believed to be wrong.

Conclusion

Remember, failure to be convicted of sin by one's conscience does not guarantee that one is right, as illustrated by Paul's life when he persecuted Christians in all good conscience. He said: "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Ac. 26:9).

On another occasion he indicated that even while engaged in those acts, he had "lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Ac. 23:1).

On the other hand, conviction by one's conscience that he is not doing right guarantees that he is sinning! God will condemn him.

May the Lord help us then to exercise ourselves that we may have a good conscience, but that we also constantly seek to educate ourselves so the conscience will judge our actions aright.

This article was first published in THINK, Vol. 29, No. 3, July-August-September, 1998

'Christ did NOT send me to baptize...'

By STEVE FONTENOT

Quoting this verse (1 Cor. 1:17), a tract from a "Bible Church" said, "If the requirements of the Gospel had included water baptism, Paul was unfaithful to his call and misleading in his message."

This is a classic example of failing to understand a figure of speech—the "not... but" Hebrew idiom—where one thing is denied ("not") in order to emphasize another ("but"). Compare: "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (Jn. 6:27).

Baptizing with his own hands is what Paul had in mind, as the context shows (vs.12-16). The administrator (who dips

you in the water) is unimportant (Jn. 4:1,2). The law of harmony will not allow the conclusion in this tract, for Paul did preach that "the requirements of the Gospel included water baptism" (Acts 16:14,15; 16:31-33; 18:8; 19:5; Rom 6:4!)

Therefore, if context and harmony rules interpretation, this is what the text means: "For Christ did not send me to baptize [i.e. to do the actual immersing of others so they would follow me], but [more importantly] to preach the gospel..." Men's faith should rest, not in men, but in the message, "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (2:2)—and this is the theme of the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians.

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

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Once again our voluntary partners have come through to provide the needed funds to fund this paper. Thank you! This issue is expected to cost about \$725, which will leave a surplus of about \$448 for future use.

Proverbs 22:1-2

*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
Loving favor rather than silver and gold.
The rich and the poor have this in common,
The LORD is the maker of them all.*

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AL DIESTELKAMP, *Editor*
260 N. Aspen Drive,
Cortland, IL 60112 • (815) 785-0401
e-mail: aldiestel@gmail.com
Web Page: www.thinkonthesethings.com

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'O KING, LIVE FOREVER!'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Try to imagine yourself in a situation where your nation has been overthrown by a foreign power, and you have been taken captive and forced into servitude to the very evil ruler who was responsible for this unwanted circumstance. What would be your attitude toward the one in power?

This was exactly the situation in which Daniel found himself from his youth through his old age. What should impress us is how this man of faith viewed the reigns of godless emperors as the result of God giving power "to whomever He chooses" (Dan. 4:25). Therefore, when addressing whoever was king, he would begin by saying, "O king, live forever!" (Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:21). His respect was not dependent on the respectability of the rulers but was the result of the respect he had for the One Who had placed them in power.

Furthermore, Daniel's respect was not mere lip service. He served with distinction in the administrations of the godless kings Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. Even when Daniel's faith in God was chal-

lenged, requiring him to obey God rather than men, he did not speak evil of the king who had sentenced him to the lion's den but said, "O king, live forever!" (6:21).

Daniel's respect toward those in authority was in agreement with principles outlined in the law of Moses which said, "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people" (Ex. 22:28). Solomon also warned, "Do not curse the king, even in your thought" (Eccl. 10:20).

Of course, it is important to note that Daniel, and other men of faith, did not participate in any evil, nor did they hesitate to rebuke rulers for their sins (i.e., Dan. 3:16-18; Mk. 6:18); but they evidently did so respectfully, considering the high regard the rulers gave in return (Dan. 2:48-49; Mk. 6:26).

This got me to consider my own attitude toward the men whom God has chosen to govern our nation. I realize that a democratic republic is quite different from other forms of government. This might make determining just who is included in "a ruler" more challenging, but it surely would include our presidents. In my lifetime, there have been fourteen men who have served

as President of the United States. In my opinion, some have been more "respectable" than others. Yes, some of them were adulterers, liars, and approved of such things "worthy of death" (Rom. 1:32), but I wouldn't trade any one of them for the likes of Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar.

There is no time in my memory when the divisions in our nation were more evident and the vitriolic attacks more vocal. (I wasn't alive during the Civil War.) It is a time when Christians have the opportunity to *be like Daniel* by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) while putting away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking...with all malice" (Eph. 4:31).

Christians should do all we can to expose evil and promote righteousness in our nation. This might include working and voting to elect honorable candidates who have respect for God's Word; but when the votes are tabulated, we need to accept the results and show honor to those elected as ones "appointed by God" (Rom. 13:1). Peter wrote, "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:18). Though we don't have a king in our nation, I suspect the Lord expects us to make the application anyway.