



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

April-May-June, 2020 • Volume 51, No. 2

THE JESUS DIFFERENCE

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” These are the words of skeptics who wrestled with the unconventional Jesus (Jn. 7:52). A compassionate, suffering, servant king who invited the weary and overburdened to find rest in Him wasn’t the Messiah people expected. His challenge to see blessing and happiness in poverty, mourning, meekness, hunger, thirst, and being merciful stretched most people to their breaking points. Some broke and left Him, while others broke and remained at His feet. Jesus was different, and He made others different.

On the way to the cross, Jesus said, “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Lk. 23:31). If people don’t do the right things when things are easy, what’s going to happen when difficult days come? He applied this to the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem, but let us make a general application to the virus pandemic we are facing. Things are getting “dry” for many people. The darkness of the world will become darker; but now, more than ever, our distinctiveness must shine. Christ has made us different; and in crisis this difference must not be compromised—not even to survive with the world.

Read Matthew 5 from the “Jesus difference” perspective: the world doesn’t murder, but we reconcile rather than get angry (5:21-26); others don’t commit adultery, but we refrain from lusting (5:27-30); our culture accepts all divorce, but we won’t divorce except for fornication (5:31-32); others swear, but our “Yes” and “No” are enough (5:33-37); the “eye for an eye” retaliation is everywhere, but we don’t resist an evil person and willingly give to others (5:38-42); and “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” doesn’t resonate with us who are committed to “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those

who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (5:43-44).

Why would children of God act so counter-culturally, so unnaturally? Jesus said that the reason is “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:45). God the Father is different, and so are His children. This difference is a family resemblance or else we are not part of His family. He is not the Father of those who don’t look like Him.

Keep reading in Matthew 5. “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (5:46). The difference Jesus makes in us is supposed to show in the fact that we love differently than those who are not Christians. Does it show in us? Do we only love the lovable—people who are nice and loving, who reciprocate our words and service? If we only love those who love us, how is our love any different from those of the world? How has Jesus made us different? How are we really being like Him?

It’s not easy to love the unlovable, but to forgive the unforgivable may be even harder for some of us. To help us, God reminds us that “if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15). This isn’t just a threat by God to leverage obedience; He is telling us that forgiving others reveals our true character, our familial resemblance. He doesn’t forgive those who don’t forgive others because they have shown they aren’t any different from the world and *are* of the world.

The “Jesus difference” touches everything from the very fiber of our being, souls, and character (love, forgiveness, etc.) to life’s mundane details. After talking about loving the unlovable, Jesus said, “And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matt. 5:47). Even our

greetings are supposed to be different from the greetings of others? We connect differently with people. We talk differently with them. We sincerely greet the widows, orphans, homeless, strangers, and people who are somehow different from us. We’re interested and kind. No matter what the world says, no one is unworthy or unclean. It may not feel natural or even safe at times, but not everything Jesus did was natural and safe, and it will be the same for His true followers (Jn. 13:15-16).

When our well-being is threatened, we are tempted to allow the natural man to go into survival mode—fight or flight. We’re seeing this in our stores as people demonstrate selfishness, panic, and lack of love for their neighbors. But we are to be different. We “do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The world sees empty shelves where we see opportunity to trust God and share with others. The world becomes helpless, but we are reminded that the power is of God. We are not crushed, not despairing, not forsaken, not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:7-9). Unbelievers won’t understand the Jesus difference. Some believers won’t understand the “Jesus difference.” But this won’t change those who have truly been made different by Jesus.

When Peter and John were arrested the Jewish rulers, “...when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. They realized that they had been with Jesus” (Ac. 4:13). Even their enemies recognized the Jesus difference. Let Jesus make us different. Act so righteously, lovingly, compassionately, patiently, and differently during this crisis that people will say of us, “They have been with Jesus!”

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

ACTUALLY LIVING BY THE PRINCIPLES

By RICK LIGGIN

At some point, we have to decide if we're going to actually live by the principles taught in Scripture, principles we all acknowledge to be right. Consider, for example, the following text: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of *all men*. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with *all men*. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord." But if your *enemy* is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21, emphasis mine, ral).

Now, does this text actually mean what it says? Does "never" actually mean *never*... in any circumstance? Is it ever right to "pay back evil for evil" (12:17)? No? Never? Is it ever okay (maybe in some very "special circumstances") for you to "take your own revenge" (12:19)? We're not talking about letting an evil doer experience the natural consequences of his own actions; rather, we're talking about taking action that is vengeful or that is "payback" for some wrong done to us. Is it ever okay to do that? This text says, no, it's *never* right to pay back evil for evil or take your own revenge! We simply are not allowed this luxury!

This doesn't mean that we are to "enable" someone who is sinning by ignoring his sin or refusing to confront it! And it doesn't mean that we should never urge him to abandon (or stop) his sinful actions in obedience to Christ. It also doesn't mean that we refuse to exercise legitimate, biblically authorized discipline against him. It's not "vengeance" or "payback for evil" when we *legitimately* exercise biblical discipline, whether that be the discipline of a child (Eph. 6:4) or an unruly Christian (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-16) or a criminal

(Rom. 13:1-7). Legitimate Bible discipline isn't payback or vengeance. It is, in fact, a necessity for the good of the one in sin. Now we had better be sure that when discipline is exercised, it is the sinner's good that motivates us to take this action and not a sense of payback or vengeance; but we must discipline sinners!

So again, does "never" actually mean *never*? Does "anyone" really mean absolutely *anyone*? Does "all men" really include *all men*? Someone answers: "Yes!" And if I'm reading this text correctly, I would have to agree: "never" means *never*; and "anyone" actually means *anyone*; "all men" really includes *all men*; and "your enemy" means *any enemy*!

So, does "anyone" include my spouse? Does "all men" include a mate? Does "never" include interaction with my spouse? Hmm. Now, we're getting personal! What if my "enemy" is my spouse...who is making my life a living hell? Does this text still apply in such cases? Must I still overcome evil with good when the evil is being propagated by a spouse who is being disobedient to the Word? We're going to have to decide whether or not we will practice the teaching of this text here...even with a difficult spouse. Are we going to obey these principles across the board or are will we practice "selective obedience" to this text?

When I assume the worst about my spouse's words or actions and then respond with anger, disgust, pouting moodiness, or the "silent treatment" based on that assumption am I taking revenge or getting "payback" for evil? What if my assumption actually turns out to be true; am I then allowed to react with anger, disgust, or pouting? Am I getting "payback" when I say hurtful and mean things to my mate because "I need to get his attention"? Am I being vengeful when I refuse to forgive a wrong or "hold a grudge" until she proves her repentance is genuine with fruit of repentance? Is it "payback" when I stay mad or hurt until he comes "groveling" before me at my feet? Am I really trying to "be

at peace with *all men*" when I snap at (or am snarky, pouty, or moody toward) my mate because of something he or she does? Whenever I meet evil with evil or don't meet evil with good, am I not failing to practice these principles?

The overriding principle in our text is this: regardless of what happened or how he or she meant it and regardless of how it sounded or how he or she acted, I still must *not ever* take my own revenge! I must *never* pay back evil for evil! I still must *not* be overcome by evil; but in every single case, I must still overcome (or meet) evil with good! So even if my spouse is disrespectful, unloving, moody, pouty, snarky, angry, hurtful or whatever, I must meet evil with good! The question is: am I really going to practice what this text says, or am I going to find "exceptions" when putting this text into practice is hard?

Let me suggest that the sooner we actually start practicing these principles, even in hard situations, the sooner we will be like Jesus...which is the point of discipleship! Don't we want—more than anything else—to be like Jesus? If so, then we need to start practicing these principles...even when it's really hard!

Now, let me also point to a beneficial by-product: it is only by *consistently* practicing these principles that our relationships with others (especially a spouse or enemy) will improve! We may protest, "But all I'm doing is trying to help her do better!" But "help" is not what we're doing! What we're actually doing is trying to *drive* them to change and do better. This *will not* work! What we have to understand is this: I cannot force, nag, pout, or punish a mate into changing for the better; I can only *influence* a change in my mate by the power of my own changed life! If anything will improve your relationship with a difficult mate, it will be a consistent application of these Biblical principles *to yourself*! And even if the consistent practice of these principles doesn't improve the relationship, at least you will be what God wants you to be! To act in any other way (any way that violates these biblical principles) is to be overcome by evil! You don't want that, and God certainly doesn't want that!

So please—for the sake of others, for the sake of your spouse, for the sake of yourself—choose to actually practice these principles! Do we really believe the principles are right? Is Christ really my Lord when I'm tempted to set aside these principles, or do I selfishly choose to be my own lord and find an "exception" to the principles? Hmm. Well, I don't know about you, but Candy's husband has some work to do!

315 E. Almond Dr., Washington, IL 61571
e-mail: rcliggin@gmail.com

GOOD GRIEF! By AL DIESTELKAMP

Grief is defined as "deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement" [MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY]. Most of us have experienced grief. While enduring it, grief certainly doesn't feel good; but in the end, it has its reward.

Perhaps that is why Solomon was inspired to write: "A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth; Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:1-3). We also know that sorrow caused by the death of a loved one who has been made righteous through Jesus Christ, though painful, is "not as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:13-14). That's *good* grief!

Accentuating the Negative

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and it was very good (Gen. 1:1,31). The first man and woman were placed in a beautiful paradise, told to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over God's creation, and were given "every tree whose fruit yields seed" for food as well as "every green herb" (1:28-30). It was likely an exquisite environment beyond our present ability to comprehend.

However, if you are familiar with "the beginning" as revealed in Scripture, your mind has already gone on to accentuate the negative. This is exactly what Satan (aka "the serpent of old" - Rev. 12:9) did in his initial effort to deceive when he asked, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (3:1). In truth, if you compare Satan's quotation of God with what God actually said (as quoted above and in 2:16), you will see that, in the context of paradise, God accentuated the positive while any negative remained an exception. It is the Devil who deceptively contorted reality by accentuating the negative to breed discontentment. It is then that we are most vulnerable to exchange truth and reality for a lie.

However, with sin came a complete reversal of the human condition. The world moved from being "very good" to being cursed with pain and suffering and death as the consequences of sin. By subjecting us to such apparent futility, God is constantly reminding us of the wages of sin (cf. Rom. 6:23).

So, now that the present reality is reversed from the original creation, Satan delights to deceptively accentuate the *positive* (rather than focus on the negative consequences of sin). For example, consider how some complain that preaching often focuses on the negative and "religion" guilts and shames people. This is because the masses do not want to deal with reality; they want to have their ears tickled with lies (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3,4).

Indeed, Scripture itself accentuates the negative from the moment sin entered the world. Thereafter, the curses are the first things pronounced by God (Gen.3:14-19). Yes, thankfully, even in those there are hints of grace and hope; but the reality is that because sin dominates the world, God's revelation accentuates the negative to identify the true problem and thereby create a longing for God's salvation. Eight of the Ten Commandments are expressed negatively.

The Law of Moses is dominated by prohibitions. When it comes to the blessings and curses that were given to Israel, the warn-

ings concerning the curses far outnumber the blessings. Indeed, the history of the nation of Israel is rife with apostasy, and the message of the prophets sent to her was predominantly negative.

The preaching of John the Baptist was a call to Israel for repentance. He referred to Israel's leaders as a "brood of vipers." The preaching of Jesus was more of the same. Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) begins with blessings but is dominated by stern warnings against hypocrisy and carnal priorities. It is true that Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it (Jn. 12:47); but it is quite revealing that He did so by accentuating the negative reality of sin and its cost.

The first sermon preached by the apostles after Jesus' ascension was full of condemnation for those who killed the Messiah (Ac. 2:23,36). This so characterized the preaching of the apostles of Jesus that the Jewish leaders complained about their negativity saying, "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring [Jesus'] blood on us!" (Ac. 5:28).

From Paul's epistles to Jesus' "letters to the churches" (Rev. 2,3), negativity dominates precisely because this present world is dominated by and in peril of sin and death. This accentuation of the negative is necessary because the truth is that sin is a real problem, and it kills. To anesthetize ourselves to that reality does nothing to solve the problem. To cry "Peace!" when there is no peace is spiritual malpractice (cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11), the equivalent of applying a Band-Aid to a mortal wound.

Of course, the ultimate purpose of God's Word is *not* to be a message of doom but is to reveal a solution to the problem of sin and death. After all, the word *gospel* means good news. However, the good news is only good to those who are being saved by it. To those who are perishing, the gospel is foolish nonsense and the negativity of the cross of Christ is a grotesque stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

The positive word *salvation* implies the reality of an extremely negative peril. The good news of Jesus Christ begins with the bad news of the reality of sin and death. So, if we fail to accentuate the negative reality of sin, which required the horror of the cross to remedy the problem, we simultaneously deemphasize the positive salvation and hope of God's grace which offers to reverse the curse and restore the human condition to glory as "far as the curse is found." Only therein can we once again truthfully and realistically accentuate the positive.

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

A SECRET DISCIPLE

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Many years ago, I had several Bible studies with a man who then obeyed the gospel but announced that he didn't want his atheistic wife to know about his conversion. Naturally, this concerned me as I wondered if he was really ready to make the commitment necessary to be a Christian. Jesus' statement that "whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Lk. 9:26) spoke loudly in my mind.

Thankfully, his "mustard seed" faith eventually grew enabling him to overcome the fear of his wife; and, although she never became a believer, almost three decades later he remains a committed Christian.

All four gospel accounts tell of Joseph of Arimathea who, for a time, was a secret disciple of Jesus (Matt. 27:57-60; Mk. 15:42-46; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42). John's account is the one that mentions his secrecy was out of "fear of the Jews." Mark's gospel reveals he was "a prominent council member," while Luke's account adds that he was "a good and just man" and one who was "waiting for the kingdom of God." Matthew's account identifies him as "a rich man...who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus."

Just at what point Joseph's faith produced enough courage to come out of the shadows is not certain, but I think we have some clues in the various gospel accounts. All of the accounts tell of him going to Pilate to request permission to take the body of Jesus down from the cross, but Mark says he "took courage" [ESV] in making the request. Other translations say that he "went boldly to Pilate" [KJV; NIV]. This action and his willingness to place the Lord's body in his own new tomb makes it reasonable to assume Joseph's faith in Christ was exposed and his discipleship was no longer a secret.

Even earlier this secret disciple did something that may have indicated his faith was already growing. As a prominent member of the council, he refused to consent to the full council's deed in wrongly convicting Jesus. This could not have been a popular position among his political peers.

We who live in "the land of the free" have brothers and sisters in Christ across the world who are disciples of Jesus in secret, for fear of enemies of Christ. Perhaps their faith has not yet grown to a point where they "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). Instead of being critical of secret disciples, we should be thankful for them and pray that their faith may increase.

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:

Printing & supplies	\$ 342.00
Postage	419.85
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 761.85
Funds available for past issue	1,939.96
Surplus	\$ 1,178.11

Donations: (as of 3/22)

Ann Van Der Voorn, IL in memory of Connie Diestelkamp	\$ 100.00
Anonymous, IL	60.00
Marlin D. & Karen K. Hilton, VA	200.00
Curtis & Beverly Mandrell, IL	20.00
James and Bonnie Lewis, WI	50.00
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 430.00
Surplus from past issue	1,178.11
Funds available for this issue	\$ 1,608.11

We want to thank all of our Voluntary Partners who continue to make this publication possible. Thanks be to God for your generous gifts. This issue is expected to cost about \$760 which should leave a surplus of about \$848 available for future issues.

JESUS: "I AM the way, the truth,
and the life. No one
comes to the Father
except through Me."

~JOHN 14:6

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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

Published quarterly by the Diestelkamp family in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice.
Distributed free in quantities and as ability permits.

260 N. Aspen Drive
Cortland, IL 60112

Return Service Requested

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Cortland, IL
Permit No. 11

ROMANS 5:12 - 6:2 • ADAM & CHRIST

THE SIN PANDEMIC

By STEVE FONTENOT

Just as Adam's sin introduced sin and judgment into the world, so Christ's death introduced righteousness and justification. *In neither case is the first act imputed to others*, Adam's sin is not considered to be my sin, nor is Christ's righteous life and sacrificial death considered to be my righteous life or death. In both cases—whether one sins and comes into condemnation or believes in Christ and is freed from sin and made righteous—*depend on the individual and his actions*.

If one sins, his own sin and its guilt is imputed to him. If one believes, he is forgiven and righteousness is imputed to him; being free from sin, he is counted as righteous. In the case of Adam and sin, death spread to all men *because all sinned*. In the case of Christ and grace, salvation was made available to all men; but only a few will enjoy it *because only a "remnant" believe and obey* (Rom. 9:27,30-33; 10:1-4).

Sin is like a pandemic. It "entered the world" and "*spread to all men*."—not simply because sin was in the world or because one man had contracted the sin

"disease"—but "*because all sinned*." This is what caused others to be "infected." Unlike a pandemic, however, *everyone* who contracted the disease "died"—"and death through sin, and so death spread to *all men*." Also, whereas a pandemic may pass away with time, sin did not. By the time of the flood, *all in the entire world* had become infected (Gen. 6:5-8). Also, in a pandemic, men may develop a medicine or surgery that rids one of the disease; *but men cannot do anything of their own* to rid themselves of the guilt of sin. The *only* "remedy" is "the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ" that can provide "justification." This remedy *without fail* provides "life." Whereas this sin pandemic made people "sinners," the cure in Jesus Christ triumphed over sin and made people "righteous."

If we have been healed, should we then throw caution to the wind and flirt with this disease? Absolutely not! "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be!" We must never forget, "The wages of sin is death!" (Rom 6:23).

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



Fear crept in, he didn't ask.
He set about his evil task.
And while I slept all warm in bed
With stealth he climbed inside my head.

Where swirling thoughts had found some rest,
Fear snuggled in and did his best.
He stole the covers, tossed and turned,
He kicked the calm for which I yearned.

Confused, I woke and found him here,
This uninvited guest called Fear,
Who drooled his lies and snored his song:
"Your joy and peace aren't here for long!"

With haste I roused the lying thief,
Who stole my joy, exchanged for grief,
Demanded that he leave my place,
Take his things, and leave no trace.

When he'd gone, my pounding heart
Replayed each moment from the start
I want to blame, but honestly,
I let Fear in, the blame's on me.

~Laura Alvarez