



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

*Philippians 4:8*

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## Racism Amidst God's People

By AL DIESTELKAMP

**R**ACISM is sin! Like other sins (Eph. 5:3), it should “not even be named” among saints. But sadly—like fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness—racism occasionally rears its ugly head among us. While I have lived long enough to see significant progress in rooting out racism in the churches, I would not presume to claim that the task is complete.

To claim progress in race relations is to acknowledge a history of racism even among our brethren. The writings of some of the pioneer preachers in our nation reveal unbecoming attitudes toward black people and brothers in Christ. As late as the 1960’s and 1970’s when segregation was being debated in our nation, a few brethren were even publicly defending some of the tenets of white supremacy. Thankfully, by that time many brethren refuted their claims, and today—if any hold such views—they seldom admit it publicly.

Hopefully, most of us today wonder how gospel preachers who otherwise seemed to hold the Scriptures in such high regard tried to defend racial discrimination. The answer is that either they had to ignore or misunderstand the Scriptures. Some claimed that God created the distinct races, thus implying that He intended that they remain apart. They not only didn’t have Scripture to prove this, but it actually contradicts Scripture. It is in opposition to the biblical statements that “in six days God made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Ex. 20:11), and that Eve was so named because she is “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

While I rejoice that progress regarding racism has been made among brethren, I’ll admit that I wonder if it has come as the result of better biblical understanding, or by adapting to the cultural changes in society. I would like to think it is the former. Racism is something that is taught and learned. It is completely absent in little children unless

older persons have poisoned their minds. There is truth in the lyrics of a song from the musical *South Pacific*: “You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late, before you are six or seven or eight, to hate all the people your relatives hate; You’ve got to be carefully taught.” Indeed, racism is hatred, and has no place among God’s people!

My early formative years were in the upper Midwest of our nation (Wisconsin and Minnesota) at a time when “people of color” comprised a much smaller minority, both in our neighborhoods and in the churches. My first memory of seeing a black person (other than in pictures) was when I was in the fifth or sixth grade. I knew him as brother Davis. I remember him as a very distinguished man who led eloquent prayers as he lifted his eyes toward heaven. (Yes, I was peeking). Later sister Shelton, a black woman with twin boys my age became part of the congregation. The boys, Elton and Welton, were in the Bible class with me. I mention this to note that I knew nothing about racism and segregation until we moved to the Chicago area when I was entering the eighth grade.

During my high school years in the “lily white” Chicago suburbs, I first became aware of racism in the church. At that time congregations in this metropolitan area were identified as either “white” or “colored.” After I graduated from high school, I continued to worship with the church in Berwyn, Illinois, a community known at that time as being “all white.” When I invited brethren from one of the “colored” Chicago churches to a singing in Berwyn, many black brethren came; but later some brethren rebuked me for inviting them. As much as I was disappointed then (to put it mildly), I am happy to report that today the Berwyn church is fully integrated. Furthermore, even though there is still much room for improvement, I know of no church that will not welcome people of different races.

As recent events have elevated racial tensions in our nation, Christians are called to be examples in showing love for all people, and to proclaim the truth that God, “made from one *man* every nation of mankind” (Ac. 17:26), making all of us His descendants and deserving of our love.

### LOVE...Thinks no evil...Believes all things

**H**AVE you ever been accused of something of which you were not guilty? It hurts, doesn’t it? And no matter what you say, the accuser isn’t convinced. Such is sometimes the case with the accusation of racism. It seems that some people see a racist around every corner (or in the case of the church, in every pew). The charge of racism is a serious charge. It’s an accusation of sin. If there is evidence of bigotry, it needs to be exposed so that repentance can occur. If there is no basis for the charge, it is an unloving act. In the Spirit-inspired list of what love is—and is not (1 Cor. 13)—there are at least two characteristics that exclude false accusations:

1. **Love “thinks no evil”** (v.5). In his commentary, Adam Clarke suggests this means “Believes no evil where no evil exists.” He says, “The original implies that he does not invent or devise evil; or does not reason on any particular act or word so as to infer evil from it.” *Clarke’s Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 269.
2. **Love “believes all things”** (v.7). About this phrase, Clarke says that the loving person, “Is ever ready to believe the best of every person, and will credit no evil of any but on the most positive evidence.” *ibid.*, p. 270.

Actually, it is not in the interest of promoting racial equality to make unfounded accusations or to *assume* that people are bigots. These only make matters worse and will inevitably delay the desired results.

# Race in America

By DERRICK YOUNG

A few years ago, a young, white brother in Christ and I were discussing the sin of racism. After I'd shared some of my experiences contending with racial hatred, he asked me "What's the worst thing that happened to you?" After considering all the unfairness—epithets, fights, threats, (all from the age of nine, mind you)—for me, the worst thing was being treated as if I didn't exist. Anyone who is blind to my humanity will allow himself to treat me inhumanely.

As is true in any group, not all share my exact experiences, perspective or conclusion, but if there's one instance of racial hatred coming from one who professes Christ, that's one too many. Unfortunately, there have been and continue to be sinful acts with a racial element that are named among those who profess to be owned by Christ.

In Luke 10, after Jesus thanks the Father (v.21) for having "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children," we're introduced to a lawyer, an expert in the Law of Moses, who questioned Jesus about how he could receive eternal life. Jesus' answer is a question: "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"

Christians should know the Law of Christ. We've heard and read Scriptures



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** After writing the articles that appear on the front page of this issue, it was suggested that it might be beneficial to look at this issue from another perspective—from one who has personally been the victim of racism. So, I asked my good friend and brother in Christ, Derrick Young, to write his thoughts on this subject.

such as Genesis 1:26-27, Acts 17:24-28, and Leviticus 19:17-18. Now, challenge yourself as you investigate Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:25-37. This Lawyer correctly understands that he must love God with his all, and love his neighbor as himself. Jesus then directs him to "do this, and you will live." The lawyer then sought to justify himself by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" This context suggests that the lawyer wasn't doing—or didn't want to do—what Jesus commanded him to do.

Sadly, there are examples of those calling themselves "Christians" yet refusing to repent of the sin of discriminating against another because of skin color. I've specifically experienced white people in the church committing this sin against "black and brown people" and refusing to repent. But consider a particular condemnation in the Luke 10 text. Have you ever considered the victim? Regardless of cultural

## HOW DO YOU READ THE SCRIPTURES?

background, the sickening scene of inaction or unwillingness to help a man who was beaten, robbed and left half dead is a tremendous failure. It's abhorrent behavior from an intercessor like a priest, or a holy assistant like the Levite. Compassion means suffering with another (weep with those who weep, for example).

The priest and the Levite in this story knew the Law and what was expected of them. The victim may have had expectations also, at least of a fellow human being willing to help. The Samaritan saw the effects of a wrong treatment, had compassion (suffered with the suffering) and acted. He took the victim's burden and made it his own debt (v.34-35). Jesus acted in such a way for all mankind. So, can a brother be justified and yet violate James 2:1-13 or 1 John 3:11-18? It's bad enough to sin by hating me because of the color of my skin.

Racial hatred is sin. To be willfully blind and insensitive to my suffering from racial hatred is also a violation against revealed commands. Given America's history, is it so difficult to believe that black and brown brethren like me feel as if we've just been passed by? Christians don't get to stand on the sidelines, folks (Eph. 5:11). Let us never fail to make application of God's Word to ourselves. Challenge yourself. How do you read it?

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# Making Knowledge Acceptable

By RICK LIGGIN

MOST of us have probably heard and can recall the wise proverb that says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). All of us would agree that this proverb is so very true. Our words can either calm the wrath of someone who is upset and ease the tension in a volatile moment or they can fan the flames of anger into a blazing fire of destruction and harm. It all depends on *how* we respond to the situation.

The next verse in this chapter of Proverbs is not nearly so well known as the first verse, but its message is just as insightful and equally important. It says, "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly" (15:2). This proverb teaches us that the truly wise man is not only interested in informing others of what they need to know. A truly wise man will want to inform in a way that makes the listener want to hear what is being said; he will speak in such a way as

to make the knowledge he is trying to pass along acceptable to his audience. He is not simply trying to "get the person told." He wants to really help the person he is trying to inform.

I've often heard my old mentor, George Lemasters, say, "I can tell you you're going to hell in a way that makes you hate me for it; or I can tell you you're going to hell in a way that makes you love me for it." And he always added, "I want to do it in a way that makes you love me for it, because that's when you're most likely to listen."

The point is: if we're careful, we can actually tell a person what he needs to hear without "pushing his buttons" or "setting him off" or driving him away! We can actually tell him what he needs to hear in a way that will make listening easier and even move him to accept what we say. And when I tell a person the truth that he needs to hear, and he accepts it—even though it's hard to hear and requires him to make difficult changes—then I've actually helped him. And isn't that really what we want to do?

Too many of us in our "quick communication, multi-media culture" have far too little concern about *how* we say what we say. We seem to be more interested in saying what we want to say, than we are in trying to communicate in ways that are truly helpful. Indeed, too many speak rashly in ways that cut deeply, "like the thrust of a sword," but if we are truly wise and truly care about being genuinely helpful, we will speak with a tongue that actually "brings healing" (Prov. 12:18).

I encourage us all to please be more careful about how we communicate with one another in whatever form of communication we choose to use. We must remember that it's not simply what we say that determines the effect of our words; it's *how* we say it that so often really makes the difference. Please, think carefully before you speak (Prov. 15:28); and when you do decide to speak, be diligent to make sure you speak wisely in a way that "makes knowledge acceptable."

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# #NOTMYCAESAR



By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

JESUS lived primarily during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, who ended his reign cloaked in paranoia, violence, and rumors of depravity and corruption. It was probably Tiberius's face on the denarius Jesus requested to be shown in response to being questioned about paying taxes to Caesar. "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" Jesus asked. They said, "Caesar's." "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus said to them (Matt. 22:17-21). Pay taxes to a corrupt government whose governors and soldiers would eventually participate in the murder of the Lord Himself? Yes.

The first Christians lived under the carnage of the cruel and bizarre reign of Caligula. When his reign was cut short by his murder, Claudius was little better. Aquila and Priscilla got to experience firsthand the emperor's ire when Claudius tried to solve his problems by expelling all Jews from the city of Rome (Ac. 18:2). Comply with a megalomaniac emperor's unreasonable edicts? Yes.

Then it was Nero's turn to plot and murder his way to the throne in Rome. He is infamous for being vicious and cruel, and for his harsh taxation. Nero's atrocities are legendary. The name Nero lives in infamy among Christians for his persecutions. Here is what the apostles wrote at the very time that this man (described by some historians as a "brutal psychopath") was reigning:

**1 Timothy 2:1-2** ~ Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

**Romans 13:1-7** ~ Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

**1 Peter 2:13-17** ~ Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Let me say again: these instructions were written during the monstrous despotic rule of Emperor Nero, the man who ascended the throne by murdering family and possible heirs to the throne; the man who kicked his pregnant wife to death; the man who openly married a man he had castrated; the man who persecuted Christians and blamed them for burning Rome. Pray for him? Yes. Be subject to

him? Yes. Honor him? Yes. Pay your taxes? Yes. #NOTMYCAESAR was not an option that Scripture gave to Christians.

Politics have caused a vast divide in our country. Some Christians want to think that a president being elected by a suspicious or even illegal method means they need not recognize or honor him. Some conclude that a president who is immoral, accepts the killing of babies (abortion), or condones the sexually deviant is not "their president." And some are judging the validity of a presidency based on their perspective on law, rights, taxes, foreign policy, or free trade. We must remember: the first century Roman emperors failed in all these areas, yet Christians were told to pray for them, submit to them, honor them, pay taxes to them.

It is legitimate to ask, "How do we honor the dishonorable?" Obviously, we are not being asked to call evil good and good evil (Isa. 5:20). Without enumerating ways to honor in every imaginable case I want to challenge each of us to examine what is in our hearts, what we say, and what we post and share on social media. Is it expressing prayerful submission and honor to our governing officials, even when (and especially when) we strongly disagree with them? If you can't think of anything positive about the elected official, that should be your challenge to let Christ live in you and prayerfully honor them. It's hard, but "...this is the will of God..." (1 Pet. 2:15). We are not simply choosing a president; we are choosing whether we will do God's will or not.

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## 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR POSTING ONLINE

By AARON DIESTELKAMP

- 1 Thou shalt not share something, even a meme, without checking its source. Citing your sources is a friend to the wise and snare to the foolish.
- 2 Thou shalt not say, "I don't know if this is true, I'm just sharing it because it is interesting." Thou shalt not hedge. You must share things that are both interesting and true to the best of your ability.
- 3 Thou shalt not respond with rudeness even when others are rude to you. A rude response begets another, but a kind response restores a friend.
- 4 Thou shalt not use sarcasm to try to "make a point." Shooting straight is best. Sarcasm makes crooked the path to your point.
- 5 Thou shalt not insult another person's intelligence. Thou shalt not insult another person at all. Why do you post to persuade your friends who need no persuading? Post to persuade your enemies and to thereby gain more friends.
- 6 Thou shalt not respond to snarkiness in kind. Treat others with compassion, and their snarkiness will be turned back on itself.
- 7 Thou shalt not go silent when you are proven wrong. Confess when you are wrong and seek to correct your misstatements so that your mistake isn't shared by others.
- 8 Thou shalt not assume the worst when reading another person's posts. Read others' posts like you would want people to read your posts.
- 9 Thou shalt show grace when people misread your posts as you would want others to show grace to you when you misunderstand them.
- 10 Thou shalt not gossip in a comments thread as if the people you disagree with aren't there. Thou shalt not gossip in a private conversation about someone who isn't there. Thou shalt not gossip at all. If you must talk about your enemies, talk about them as if they were your friends. Love your enemies.

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*"Ponder the path of your feet,  
And let all your ways be  
established."*

PROVERBS 4:26

# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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# ← PICK YOUR PATH →

By NOAH DIESTELKAMP

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood/And sorry I could not travel both/And be one traveler, long I stood/And looked down one as far as I could/To where it bent in the undergrowth." Though what Robert Frost was wanting to communicate in his well-known piece "The Road Not Taken" has been discussed at great length, many people have identified with the poem, especially the struggle of having to choose one path or experience over another. I believe humans tend to have an innate wistful attitude about life's "roads not taken." It's as though we have a constant itch in the back of our heads asking "what if?"

In the first Psalm, we see two paths (or "ways") laid before us. It can almost be read as a story of two men. The first man is the "blessed" man of Psalm 1:1. His path leads him to avoid the advice, company, and attitudes of the wicked (1:1). He takes joy in studying, contemplating, and doing God's law (1:2). As a result, he is strengthened—rooted like a tree next to a river with a constant source of nourishment—bearing

fruit, and enduring through the seasons of life (1:3). Best of all, his efforts are known by the Lord, and he is counted among the righteous (1:5-6)

On the other hand, we have the second man. His path leads him toward the wicked. He begins by taking their advice, decides to remain in their company, and finally adopts their attitudes and lifestyles for himself: He "sits" in their "seat" (1:1). As a result, we see that his outcome is contrasted to that of the blessed man. Instead of being planted by the river, the wicked man becomes dried up and withered, blowing away at the slightest breeze, like chaff (1:4). This man's path continues to get worse. Upon judgment, the man fails to be counted with the righteous (1:5) and his path terminates in one end: death (1:6)

The beauty of Psalm 1 is that it presents us with the only two possible paths. I mean this in the sense that there are only *two possible destinations*—two endpoints. The path of the blessed leads to life, "for the LORD knows the way of the righteous" (1:6, ESV). The path of the wicked ends in death, as "the way of the wicked will perish" (1:6, ESV). With only these two end-

points to choose from, the natural question upon reading Psalm 1 is which path will we choose? These are not two equally good paths diverging in a yellow wood where we get all wistful about missing out on the opportunities of one by taking the other. These are two drastically different eternal destinations! Isn't the choice obvious? We should choose life! We know that we should choose life!

In order to navigate towards a destination, we need to know the map. If our desired destination is life, via the path of the blessed, then our map must be God's Word! We need to know it and appreciate it (Psa. 1:2, ESV). We do not consider a map restrictive when it wants to keep us on the road instead of crashing through guardrails and driving through ditches. Neither should we consider the law of God restrictive when it guides our lives along "the narrow way" (Matt. 7:13-14, ESV). Each day, each minute, each moment—we get to choose. Will we navigate towards life or towards death? Let us choose carefully and consistently the path of the blessed.

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