



# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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## ‘...Remember The Poor...’

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

“THEY DESIRED ONLY THAT WE SHOULD REMEMBER THE POOR, THE VERY THING WHICH I ALSO WAS EAGER TO DO”

(Galatians 2:10)

“GET A JOB!” “There are organizations to help.” “This violates my economic or political philosophies.” “Oh no, another scam.” Are these our thoughts when we hear, “remember the poor”? Beware, lest we close our eyes and minds to God’s will that we remember the poor.

### Remember Means: See

It is easy to live a life that is insulated from the poor. We can live and work and shop where the poor do not frequent. Their absence can make us unfamiliar with them and their suffering, and it can affect our thinking toward them.

“Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people” (Ps 113:5-8). God “humbles Himself,” “stoops down” (NIV) to see things as they are, and we must be willing to do the same. We are called to be “rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share...” (1 Ti 6:17-19). “Remember the poor” means we go to them to see the poverty and need.

### Remember Means: Think Differently

“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven” (Lk 6:20). This was Jesus’ radically different way of thinking about the kingdom. Jesus Himself was unexpected: “...though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Co 8:9).

Instead of seeing the poor as a burden, we need to think of the poor as opportunities to

serve and to “lend to the LORD” (Pr 19:17). We need to invite and serve those who can’t repay (Lk 14:13-14), giving them the seats of honor (Ja 2:3-5).

### Remember Means: Have Active Faith & Love

“...If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Ja 2:14-17). “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him” (1 Jn 3:17-19).

James says that not helping a poor brother or sister is faith without works. John says God’s love doesn’t abide in such a one. It’s the failure that Jesus envisions at the judgment in Matthew 25, “...I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me...inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Mt 25:42-45). We need to avoid things that signal unloving superiority, reluctance, or acting only out of obligation. How we talk about poverty in other situations or on social media must not communicate an unloving, uncaring spirit: “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (Pr 17:5).

### Remember By Being Eager

Paul was “eager” to “remember the poor” (Ga 2:10). Materialism or “self-made” success may make us reluctant. Bad experiences with others may make us reluctant.

Organizations, charities, and government programs may make us reluctant. Philosophies about economics, politics, and legal rights may make us reluctant. Social movements which hijack the needs of the poor may make us reluctant. Our commitment of faith and love should push past the things that make us reluctant to see what is really needed and find the right way to help.

God is not calling His people to do just anything. Serving is never supposed to be “zeal without knowledge” (cf Pr 19:2; Ro 10:1-2). It is tempting for God’s people to jump on bandwagons and social movements to just do something. Instead, we need to go to God’s word and look for applications.

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Ja 1:27). “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Ga 6:10). Each of us needs to “remember the poor” by being personally involved with our neighbors, communities, and churches to know the needs and to work to relieve them. We need to resist the temptation to rely on organizations, institutions, and government programs to completely relieve us of our responsibilities to the poor.

Thoughtful eagerness will use church funds for “saints” as is consistently shown in the New Testament (Ac 2:44; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; 1 Ti 5:16; Ro 15:25-31; 1 Co 16:1-3; 2 Co 8:4; 9:4). However, let us avoid overreacting to abuses by being reluctant to relieve the needs of Christians or allowing a stigma of shame to hover over Christians receiving relief from the treasury. Don’t hold to the truth on this controversial issue but then refuse to “remember the poor” among us.

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# A TIME TO DISOBEY

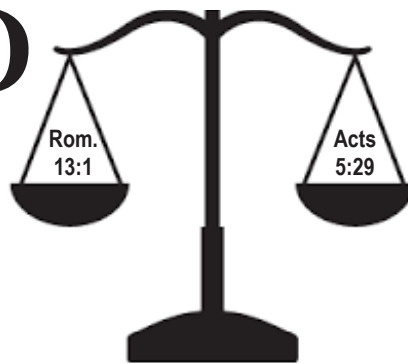
By PAYTON MILLER

IF YOU HAVE BEEN LIVING IN AMERICA over the past year or so, you have likely asked yourself questions along these lines: How are God's people supposed to conduct themselves in face of an evil government? Should God's people have done anything differently when commanded to shut down assembling on the Lord's Day? What will God's people do if the government demands something similar, or worse, in the future? Do we have biblical examples where God's people were put in similar situations to compromise their faith, priorities, beliefs, principles, conscience, etc., by those in authority and, if so, what was their response?

These questions and the subsequent debates often cause polarizing responses. This tendency to flee to one extreme or the other often has to do with the fact that some scriptures teach one principle while others teach a seemingly contradictory principle. For instance, how can it be that Romans 13 tells us that Christians "must be in subjection" to government and Acts 5:29 teaches us to "obey God rather than men?" The solution to reconciling these passages is not to pick a side and set up camp no matter what we encounter. The solution is to apply each passage appropriately given the circumstances, understanding that our reasoning on a particular issue should never be limited to one passage if the Bible provides more instruction about it somewhere else.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." With respect to governmental demands, the totality of the Bible makes it clear that there is "a time to obey" and "a time to disobey." The truth of the matter is that God expects us to be people who are well trained to know when to submit to God by our *obedience to government* and when to submit to God by our *disobedience to government*. To quote the famous line from Mr. Miyagi in *Karate Kid*: "Balance is key."

The dilemma for Christians often arises when we find ourselves in situations where we have to exercise our "powers of discernment" (Heb. 5:14) and determine whether God would be more pleased with our obedience or our disobedience. Where is that line? My purpose is not to answer that question for you, but rather to provide what I see in Scripture as examples of God's people practicing some degree of civil disobedience, defined as "refusal to comply with certain laws/demands as a peaceful protest." Allow me to offer these seven circumstances as a guideline:



1. When innocent life was on the line (Ex. 1:8-22; Heb. 11:23; Josh. 2:1-24; Jas. 2:25; Heb. 11:31; Est. 4:8-17).
2. When conscience or resolution were threatened (Dan. 1:8-20).
3. When religious customs or observances were disregarded, disturbed, or interrupted (Dan. 6:1-28; Ez. 3-5).
4. When allegiance was questioned or priorities were blatantly rearranged (Dan. 3:1-30).
5. When the gospel was at stake (Ac. 4:1-21; Ac. 5:17-33).
6. When citizenship rights were violated (Ac. 16:16-39; Ac. 22:22-29).
7. When the spirit of the law was missed (Matt. 12:1-14; Jn. 5:1-18).

In short, how did these biblical characters respond when confronted with these dilemmas?

- When given a direct command by Pharaoh to kill the male Hebrew babies, the Hebrew midwives "did not do as the King of Egypt commanded them," lied when questioned, and God "dealt well with them" for having "feared God."
- When the King of Jericho sent to Rahab to give up the Israelite spies, she purposefully went against those orders, lied when confronted, and, as a result, God's people "dealt kindly and faithfully" toward her—*resulting in her being mentioned twice in the New Testament as a model of active faith.*
- When Esther had an opportunity to rescue her people from certain death at the hands of the king, she determined to boldly approach him on this matter, "though it is against the law."
- When Daniel was expected to fit in by defiling himself with the King's food and drink, he resolved to speak up, stand out, endure potential pressures, was granted his request—and *God gave him "learning, skill, and understanding."*
- When the newly signed law read "Don't pray to anybody but the king," Daniel, with full knowledge of the edict, "did as he had done previously" by praying

to God all three times in the same location—with his windows open!

- When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were ordered to compromise their allegiance to God by bowing to the king's image, they "paid no attention" and refused to bow unto the point of death—and *were eventually rescued!*
- When Peter and the apostles were charged to stop speaking and teaching anything about Jesus, they publicly continued preaching and, later when confronted about their defiance, responded that they "must obey God rather than men."
- When Paul was mistreated by the authorities, he responded by understanding and utilizing his citizenship rights for the benefit of the kingdom and to save his own skin—and *the government, in fear, apologized!*
- When the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus into breaking the letter of the law, He pointed the religious leaders to the spirit of the law by referencing an Old Testament example.
- When the "powers that be" pressured God's people into ceasing their work on the temple and indirectly prevented their worship, they *complied* and a whole book (Haggai) was written about how that was not God's desired response.

Despite what Romans 13 and other passages teach as general principles for Christian living, numerous specific examples show us that civil disobedience can be a godly response to godless authority. Depending on the circumstances, this practice was not only acceptable, but even encouraged, and outright expected of God's people.

The same is true for Christians today, both in America and across the globe. We should not be surprised when doing the right thing puts us at odds with a worldly government (1 Pet 4:12-19). Suffering at the hands of evil leadership for Christ's sake should bring us no fear or shame. (1 Pet 3:13-17). Sometimes this will involve us telling the government where we stand, living our lives accordingly, and dealing with the consequences. In order to prevent these types of situations, Christians should be praying that the government not interfere with our walk with Christ (1 Tim 2:1-3.) When interference does arise, may God help us to follow the pattern from "former days...written down for our instruction" (Rom 15:4).

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# Consider the Birds

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

I ENJOY THE CHANGE OF SEASONS, and my favorite season is spring. I just love seeing nature *spring* to life. Last November my wife and I, inspired by a bunch of cardinals in our cedar tree, decided to put up a couple of bird feeders. It has been a pleasant experience, and now that spring is near the birds and squirrels are becoming much more active and “twitterpated.”

The observation of nature prompts wonder and thought. King David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). In two other psalms David wrote, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalms 14:1; 53:1). Yet, the prevailing belief among many is that the heavens declare that a cosmic accident occurred billions upon billions of years ago, and that it is the believer in God who is the fool.

When we observe the animals closely, we not only see them in their best poses in idyllic settings eating at our feeders, but we may also see them regurgitate or defecate and even copulate. To these latter activities, we may have a childish negative reaction; but intellectually we understand that all of these things are natural and that we as humans also do all of these things.

Perhaps it is this reality that has contributed to the theory that humans are merely highly-evolved animals. Perhaps it is this evolutionary theory which has contributed to humans behaving like animals.

However, we who study nature and see the glory of God have a perspective that sees significant differences between ourselves and the animal kingdom. Jesus told us to consider the birds and ourselves relative to them (Luke 12:24). The ancient Scriptures affirm that “in the beginning, God created” the natural world (Genesis 1:1). While revealing that God made human bodies out of natural stuff (2:7,22,23), the Scriptures also make a clear distinction between humans and the rest of creation. “So God created man in His own image . . . male and female He created them,” (1:27) and gave humans dominion over His creation (v. 28). Now, before you dismiss this perspective as merely religious mythology, consider the alternative.

When we describe a person as behaving like an animal, it is generally not a compliment. Yet, if we are simultaneously teaching generation after generation that we are nothing more than animals, can we be surprised to see an increase in animal-like behavior among humans? Thinking that humans are animals has detrimental con-



sequences. For example, sexual promiscuity is prevalent among the animals, and we think nothing of it; it's natural. We impose no moral responsibility upon animals to exercise self-control over their inclinations to copulate with whomever wherever. If humans *are* animals, then it would be natural for us to be sexually promiscuous as well, and, it is reasoned by an increasing number of people, we should think nothing of it. Indeed, moral opposition to sexual behavior which deviates from the standard revealed by our Creator is often labeled as being hateful.

Is it hateful to oppose sexual harassment? When I observe the birds, I see males attempting to dominate females without their consent. It's natural! On what basis do we expect humans to get consent from those who have attracted their sexual interests? Those who dismiss God as irrelevant have no answer to this question that is consistent with their worldview. Those who acknowledge God as Creator *do* have an answer that is consistent with the worldview they espouse.

“Of how much more value are you than the birds?” Jesus asked rhetorically (Luke 12:24). We are not animals, and we are not to behave like them. Sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation among humans is evil because it is contrary to the purpose for which we were created and it dishonors those made in God's image.

Those who say there is no God *must* say that we are nothing more than animals; therefore, they can offer no logical limits on human behavior. Unbridled human behavior is a known path to certain destruction which ought to give all people pause to consider the will of our Creator. Yet many stubbornly resist the idea of God and complain about the One they don't believe exists. “When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD” (Proverbs 19:3).

## Reciprocal Grace

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

GOD IS GRACIOUS (Eph. 2:7). As Christians we are called to be followers of Him (Eph. 5:1), which means that we also should be gracious. We manifest grace—or lack thereof—by how we act toward one another.

The need to be gracious toward one another is especially evident during the “present distress” brought on by a worldwide pandemic coupled with social and political unrest. I fear the ease of being able to voice opinions on social media from a cell phone or laptop has emboldened people to leave their grace toward others behind. Accusations of brethren having “a lack of faith in God” or “a lack of love toward others” are judgments that don't seem very gracious.

We all have our own opinions about how the governing authorities should handle the pandemic crisis or which set of “experts” we should believe. We are in uncharted territory, so to insist that you agree with me

would be an act of arrogance. Therefore I need to be gracious toward you and should expect the same in return.

Even most of the so-called “experts” on all sides of the controversies surrounding this crisis are assuring us that eventually “we will get through this.” If the Lord wills, we will; but, in the meantime, just think of the damage that will be done to the cause of Christ by the vitriolic debate amongst brethren over opinions and disagreements that cannot be settled simply by a “thus saith the Lord.”

What we need to practice is reciprocal grace. The price God paid for the grace He has showered on us is beyond our ability to repay, but He asks us to “pay it forward” toward others—a lesson we surely learned from Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35). This is not limited to being willing to forgive those who trespass against us. We also must deal graciously with one another—even those with whom we disagree.

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### SENTENCE SERMON:

*Kind words make good echoes*

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## 'O Wretched Man That I Am!'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

THESE WORDS are what we might expect from the lips of one who is lost in sin, but instead they are from the pen of a faithful Christian who recognized that his struggle with sin was an ongoing battle. This declaration was preceded by a personalized description of what he continued to face when his fleshly desires conflicted with his spiritual desires (see Rom. 7:13ff). And he admitted that the fleshly desires sometimes prevailed! (v.19).

Paul's persecution of the church before his conversion was well-known, and even though these sins were "washed away" (Ac. 22:16), he nevertheless bore the scars of these actions his whole life, as evidenced by describing himself as "least of the apostles... not worthy to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9). This is also likely why he viewed himself as "chief" among sinners whom Jesus came to save (1 Tim. 1:15). But his confession in the Roman letter was not about the sins of his former life, but an ever-present struggle.

The apostle Paul could have easily taught the same lesson without confessing his own struggle with sin, but the fact that he spoke of his own battle makes it so much more helpful for us. We might be curious as to what fleshly desires made Paul vulnerable to sin, but he didn't reveal this information. Perhaps it's best, for had he told us of his specific temptations I might be inclined to discount them as "not like what I face" and miss the whole point.

Like Paul, we struggle daily with the war between our fleshly desires and our spiritual desires. There are so many ways we are vulnerable to sinfulness—in thought, in action, and even in inaction. Some sins are more evident than other sins (1 Tim. 5:4), but every sin should make me cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). Then say, like Paul, "I thank God—through Jesus our Lord!" (v.25).



*Lavon Speer* 1936 - 2020

LAVON AVONELL SPEER was born September 27, 1936, in Phelps County, Missouri, the daughter of Leslie and Alice Diestelkamp. She died at her home in Winchester, Kentucky, on October 8, 2020. All the days of Lavon were 84 years and 11 days.

Lavon was baptized into Christ at the age of 14 and remained a faithful Christian the rest of her life. On June 8, 1956, she married Robert E. Speer and was a faithful partner and co-worker with him in his work as a gospel preacher with churches in seven states over the years, as well as two years in Nigeria, West Africa. Until disease prevented it she remained active in teaching Bible classes while a member of the church in Winchester.

She is survived by her husband and their six children, Tanja (Dan) Guyer of Winchester, Kentucky; Renee (Dawson) Guyer of Danville, Indiana; Benita (Dennis) Allan of Jarinu, Brazil; Dawn (Peter) Thompson of Madison, Indiana; Rob (Becky) Speer of Rockford, Illinois; and Kyle (Tawnie) Speer of Orange, California. Also surviving are 20 grandchildren and 31 great-grandchildren; her sister, Wanda Hodges, two brothers, Karl Diestelkamp and Al Diestelkamp, and many nieces and nephews and their families. She was preceded in death by her parents and one brother, Roy Diestelkamp.

Lavon, along with Robert and their family played a significant part during the early days of this family publication, maintaining the mailing list at a time before computers when it was a more laborious task.

As one of her siblings I am pleased to say that Lavon was a blessing to our family and to many others who knew her.