

2 TIMOTHY 2:23-26

"Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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PROCLAIM THE UNKNOWN

By **PAYTON MILLER**

QUARRELS SHOULD BE AVOIDED. Truth should be taught. On the surface, this passage presents two Christian endeavors that seem to be difficult to live out in our world. How does the Lord's servant make sure that he is not considered quarrelsome and yet is still able to teach and correct his opponents? We may be tempted to consciously avoid any and all conflict that *could* turn into a "foolish, ignorant controversy" (2 Tim. 2:23). However, in our effort to avoid conflict, we can easily miss opportunities to defend the truth and thereby decrease the likelihood for people to "come to their senses" (v. 26). Paul is trying to communicate to Timothy (and to us) that there is a way to teach the truth, and even correct one's opponent, without earning the label of being "quarrelsome."

I probably do not have to tell you that our social media age has made it extremely difficult to strike this delicate balance. Often times, the result is the worst of both worlds—a quarrel in which truth is noticeably absent. In his essay entitled "Please, Ask Me Why," Peter Heck, columnist and editor of *Not the Bee*, makes this observation: "There are plenty of pop culture tendencies that manifest in our overly-connected world of social media that are both obnoxious and obtuse. Chief among them perhaps is the habit of pseudo-intellectuals posting a premise or claim, only to exhibit indignation when someone dares to question or challenge it." It takes little imagination to see how presenting an alternate viewpoint to people who think they know everything would result in an argument.

How do you respond when your belief about {insert any moral/spiritual/doctrinal issue here} is challenged? Often times, our instinct is to summarize our beliefs in such a way that prematurely ends the debate. For example, "I am pro-life because abortion is

murder. End of story." This type of response to those who clearly believe the opposite will only cause them to further dig in their heels and respond in kind, "You anti-choice, women-hating, clump of cells." Do you sense a back-and-forth quarrel arising from this encounter? Our reluctance to fully explain ourselves can potentially be attributed to our own insecurity about the position which we are defending. Perhaps we need a reminder that, if our position is the truth, we should have no fear of opposition. As the saying goes, "Truth does not mind being questioned. A lie does not like being challenged." Our reluctance to fully explain ourselves can also potentially be attributed to our lack of patience with those who we believe should already know better.

In Acts 17:16-34, Paul provides us with a good example of how to respond when our beliefs are challenged. After reasoning with Paul, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers responded with some notable questions: "What does this babbler wish to say?... May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean" (vs. 18-20). Paul could have easily taken offense at being called a "babbler" or his preaching being labeled "foreign." He could have easily thought that if Jesus and the resurrection are "strange things to their ears" (v. 20), then there is not much hope for these people and dismissed altogether the inquiries. He could have easily summarized the gospel message in a way

that made sense only to him given his prior knowledge and expected people without his worldview to understand it or be condemned.

Notice that Paul did not take any of those routes. He was prepared with a lengthy, patient, and confident response to address their questions. He established common ground with his opponents (vs. 22-23). He explained that his beliefs about current day events were ultimately rooted in his belief about what happened at the beginning of time (vs. 24-26). He pointedly called on the audience to change their behavior by identifying man's responsibility towards the Creator (vs. 27-30). He concluded his message by warning his opponents of what will take place if they fail to heed the truth (v. 31). He did not overreact when the audience responded in distinctly different ways: mocking, interest, belief (vs. 32-34).

The world needs Christians who can, as Paul did, explain fundamental, self-evident truths by pointing people to our Biblical worldview (1 Pet. 3:15). The world needs Christians who are eager to share their decision-making rationale because every meaningful decision we make ought to provide a perfect segue into discussion about God (Matt. 5:16). The next time you are questioned about one of your beliefs, remember that the person with whom you are conversing may not have gone through the mental exercise necessary to arrive at your fundamental conclusion. Instead of being angry with people who disagree with you, re-frame your mindset and be excited by an opportunity to share the truth with someone who needs to hear it. God may be putting you in that conversation to help "lead them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). Someone had to teach you and probably did it most effectively by sharing the *why* behind his/her beliefs. Be that person for someone else and proclaim the unknown! (Ac. 17:23)

QUOTE: "I have so much hope.

The reason for it all begins in a borrowed manger and ends at an empty tomb. And contrary to current social trends, I'd love for you to ask me why."

~Peter Heck

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‘But I Say to You...’

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT, King Jesus shows how radically different His kingdom citizens will be from citizens of the kingdoms of the world. Six times in one section, Christ uses the contrasting literary structure “you have heard...but I say.” As King, He isn’t simply raising the moral bar. It is superficial and inadequate to observe that Jesus simply wants us to avoid things that lead to what are thought to be more egregious sins. Jesus is returning things to the way God originally intended them to be. These are the sort of things that characterize His kingdom and, therefore, its citizens. In this section, Jesus talks about sexual sin, lying, retaliation, and hatred—but He starts by confronting the practice of labeling others “fools.”

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

~Matthew 5:21-22

In our confidence that we aren’t going to murder anyone, we may ignore this scripture and allow the heart of a murderer to live in us. It is from that heart that adultery (5:27), divorce (5:31), lying (5:33), retaliation (5:38), and hatred (5:43) also proceed.

What Jesus is saying here is desperately needed today. “Raca” is a transliteration of an Aramaic term which was evidently a common insult meaning “useless and empty” and “without a brain.” In *Christ Revealed, A Commentary on Matthew*, Kenny Chumbley says it is a “quasi-swear word (*rake*) that means empty headed, worthless or imbecile” (pg. 97). Kingdom citizens do not exalt themselves over others, nor do they see others as completely worthless, so degrading insults are inconsistent with who they are.

Jesus then adds, “But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” I am aware of the fact that Scripture calls some people fools. We can “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) by applying scriptures to show people that the Holy Spirit calls them “fools” when it applies. But kingdom citizens will not minimize what Jesus says here. This is not only about

a change in vocabulary; it is about what we think about others (which then determines what we say about them—Lk. 6:45). Jesus is telling us that, unlike the world, those who submit to His rule will see value in all others, no matter what differences exist or what mistakes they have made.

He is teaching that insulting language—name calling, racial, ethnic, and social slurs, etc.—that demeans a fellow human being is condemned by God” (Chumbley, pg. 98). Our English word “moron” comes from this Greek word “fool” (*moros*).

Even more “acceptable” insults will not be spoken by kingdom citizens because they honor, respect, and value others..

When we disagree with people, or when we think someone is doing something without good reasoning or truth, we must not demean or devalue them. When people do what we think are silly things, unscientific things, thoughtless things, or blindly follow others, we must not think of and label them as worthless. We need to listen to ourselves. God is listening!

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‘Follow the Science’

By AL DIESTELKAMP

I HAVE NO INTENTION of or interest in getting involved in the current controversies surrounding the management of the Covid-19 outbreak that have popularized the phrase “follow the science.” Proponents of vaccine mandates first employed this appeal, but recently I have heard people on *both sides of the issue* use this phrase to suggest that “the science” supports their personal opinions. Let me begin by acknowledging that even among my own immediate family members and other loved ones there is no consensus on how to “follow the science” regarding the issues at hand.

While recognizing that true *science* is one and the same as *knowledge*, we have been warned to avoid “contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20). My greatest concern about the call to “follow the science” has little to do with the current issues. I am more concerned about how the elevating of what is *called* science will be applied in other controversies—especially regarding the creation account and the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Many of the very scientists whose “findings” we are being asked to “follow” would scoff at the very idea of God creating the universe in six days, let alone a third-day bodily resurrection from the dead; and I can imagine their argument would be to “follow the science.” Even the few scientists who claim to believe in God and the Bible will often suggest that the Genesis account of creation is allegorical and that the word *day* should not be taken in the more literal sense suggested by “the evening and the morning.”

The primary reason people interpret the Genesis account of creation as allegorical is that they think they are “following the

science.” They suggest that God creating the world “old,” equipped with natural resources that would otherwise take millions of years to develop naturally, would be deceptive. While affirming that an all-powerful God *could* create a fully-grown man from the dust of the earth and a woman from his rib in one day, many are still inclined to “follow the science” of those who question the very existence of God.

Even if one might imagine that the Genesis account of creation was written allegorically, God later spoke to Moses on two occasions regarding the establishment of the Sabbath on the seventh day using the creation week of Genesis. It does not logically follow that Moses was speaking allegorically when He reiterated, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day...” (Ex. 20:11; 31:17).

Of greatest concern is how Satan might use this mantra to “follow the science” regarding the resurrection. We must not be “ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). From “the beginning” “the devil” “is a liar and the father of it” (Jn. 8:44), and he will try to convince us that science does not support the possibility of the bodily resurrection from the dead. He has already convinced a host of people not to believe that the Word literally became flesh (Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 4:3) or that He died and rose from the tomb on the third day. If we swallow this lie, our “faith is futile” (1 Cor. 15:17) and “we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Cor. 15:19).

True science is good! What men *call* science is not always true. Therefore, when that which is called “science” is in conflict with God’s Word, we should not “follow the science.”

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Enduring Discomfort

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE are very much esteemed by all of us. We gravitate toward that which is easier just as water takes the path of least resistance. However, we also know intellectually that what is comfortable for us is not *always* good for us.

From the shoes we wear to our favorite chair to the postures we prefer when sitting, standing, or sleeping, comfortable does not necessarily equal healthy. Indeed, what we find comfortable in the moment might actually end up being the cause of great discomfort in the long run.

We do the same with food. We may eat our favorite foods in unhealthy quantities simply because they make us feel good for the few seconds they are on our tongues. Such “comfort foods” eaten without self-control can result in great discomfort.

We spend great amounts of money to make ourselves comfortable without considering the danger that can come with making our comfort such a high priority in our lives. To some, discomfort is an “evil” to be avoided. Thus, personal discomfort may be avoided more than actual evil is avoided. Comfort can become our god; and if it does, we will be completely unprepared to endure the long-term discomforts that often come as a result of our pursuit of short-term comforts.

Conversely, bodily exercise may make us uncomfortable in the moment but will make us healthier and stronger in the long run. If we know this to be true physically, then consider the potential benefits of spiritual exercise. “Exercise yourself to godliness” was Paul’s admonition to Timothy, and it applies to us as well, “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:7,8).

Most who are taking the time to read this article are doing so in a comfortable environment. However, those of you who have read to this point in the article have probably also been tempted to *stop* reading because of the discomfort it has caused (or might yet cause in application). Good for you for being willing to endure some minor discomfort that comes with having your lifestyle, faith, or worldview challenged. I hope you have the patience to finish.

There is much that is uncomfortable when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, its foundation was laid in His humbly “coming in the likeness of men” and being “obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7,8). “Christ crucified” is the gospel we preach

(1 Cor. 2:2). Crucifixion is not comfortable to contemplate, let alone endure. But this is what God did to rescue us from our sins. Indeed, the tortuous horror of the cross exemplifies just how bad our sins are while Jesus’ willingness to endure it demonstrates just how much He loves His creation (e.g. Hebrews 2:9-18). Indeed, it is the cross that challenges those of us who identify with Him to likewise endure (cf. Hebrews 12:1-11; 1 Peter 2:20-24).

The initial spread of the gospel was not a comfortable undertaking. It was in the context of increasing persecution that the gospel “went everywhere” (Acts 8:1-4) and “turned the world upside down” (17:5,6). However, in modern contexts, “turn[ing] the world upside down” with the practical application of the gospel of Jesus Christ is often avoided precisely because it is uncomfortable.

It has been my privilege to go to Sierra Leone (West Africa) to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to a population living in abject poverty. Why go to Africa? It is certainly not because it is a comfortable place to be. It is because three weeks in that uncomfortable environment yields more contacts for the pure gospel than does three years in Pontiac, Illinois. And before you think too highly of those of us who “sacrifice” three weeks to go there, consider those who have *moved* there—not for the sake of comfort—but for the sake of the gospel and the souls it can save.

But aren’t the souls in America as valuable as those in Africa? Certainly! However, could it be that because we, as a culture, are so comfortable and so busy pursuing and preserving our comforts, freedoms, and ways of life that we have neglected and rejected *the* Way of life that offers the greatest of liberties and comforts? Could it be that we and our churches reflect our culture of comfort more than we do the crucified Christ? We are not called to be spiritual couch potatoes (spectators on padded seats in climate-controlled environments). We are called to exercise ourselves to godliness because this is what is truly profitable now and for eternity. “This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. In fact this is why we work hard and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of believers” (1 Tim. 4:9,10 NET).

May any discomfort caused by this article motivate us to pursue the eternal over the temporal, to pursue God and His will over our fleeting interests and pleasures. Consider this article to be just a little exercise unto godliness. Thanks for enduring this to the end.

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*From God to
His Tired Servant...*

*I see you there upon your bed.
A million thoughts run through your head.
A weary mind that tries to rest,
Your strength is gone, you’ve done your best.*

*In love you’ve labored all day long
To help my saints and keep them strong.
Could I forget to then help you,
My loyal friend, My servant true?*

*Oh no, My child, I won’t forget
Your weary mind with cares beset,
The way you always seek to serve;
Your faithful spirit does not swerve.*

*Now rest My child, My precious son,
I won’t forget the work you’ve done.
You’ve helped the ones who needed Me;
Let Me refresh you bountifully.*

*So lean on Me as this day ends.
I’ll give you strength, be your defense.
I’ll satisfy your weary soul.
I’ll bind you up and make you whole.*

~by Laura Alvarez

based on Hebrews 6:10 and Jeremiah 31:25

SEEKING PREACHER

The Edgebrook Lane church in Sycamore, Illinois, is seeking a man to work with us in the gospel. We are a congregation with an average attendance of 32-34. Sycamore is located 60 miles due west of downtown Chicago (with cornfields between us and the western suburbs). The larger city of DeKalb adjoins Sycamore, boosting the county population to approximately 105,000 residents. DeKalb is the home of Northern Illinois University, which has an annual enrollment exceeding 20,000 students.

I have preached in Sycamore since 1988 and intend to continue to be involved in preaching and teaching as long as I am able. For the past four and one-half years, David Neal Bunting has worked with us. He is re-locating to Rapid City, South Dakota, in February.

Those interested in the work in Sycamore are encouraged to contact me by email, text, or phone. You are also welcome to visit our website — www.sycamorechurch.com

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Voluntary Partners

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Philippians 4:8

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LIVING

By MATT HENNECKE

AS BEST WE CAN DETERMINE, there were about 40 writers of the Bible. Moses and several prophets wrote most of the Old Testament books. Eight or nine men are credited with writing the New Testament. The most prolific of the New Testament authors was Paul who wrote almost half of the New Testament books. John comes in second, followed by the apostle Peter. They all were, of course, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

What is interesting to me is that all of the writers of the Bible were in a sense writing about one event, or, to be more accurate, one Person: Jesus Christ. The Old Testament writers wrote *prophetically*, while the New Testament writers wrote *posthumously*.

So, they all wrote about Jesus; but Jesus did not write a single word Himself. Well, that may not be quite accurate. John chapter 8 records an event when some scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They tested Jesus by asking, "Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you



say?" You remember what happened next? "Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground." This interesting and compelling event has been the subject of much conjecture. What did Jesus write? Barclay speculates Jesus wrote on the ground the sins of those who stood there testing Him. The entire event isn't even found in the oldest manuscripts.

So here's the question: Why didn't Jesus author a single word of Scripture? Why? Because He *is* the Word. But this doesn't mean that Jesus didn't write. He did write, and He still writes. No, He does not write with a reed pen on parchment. He uses a different stylus on a different medium.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says something amazing to the Christians there when he commends their faith and says of them "you are a letter written by Christ...not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." In other words, true believers are living letters written by Christ for others to

EPISTLES

read. We are meant to be His penmanship, so others see Him in us.

So, Christ does indeed write and is still writing, and we are His parchment, His penmanship, His people. When we get into the Word—or more accurately when the Word gets into us—Christ is there writing Himself into every part of our inner being. Our will is being overwritten by His will, and thus we become His living letters.

The Lord's Supper, in a way, is the act of dipping ourselves into the ink of Christ's blood so that by our lives we can be epistles of Christ to the world. While we have no evidence of Jesus authoring anything with pen and ink, He is the Author of our salvation. The Hebrew writer put it this way: "Though He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered, and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." (Heb. 5:8-9). As we partake of the memorial meal, it's important to remember the Author of salvation. Let us fill our minds with the memory of the body He sacrificed and fill our hearts with the ink of His blood so that others might see His hand working in us.

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