



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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‘Nevertheless At Your Word I Will...’

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

IT HAD BEEN ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS for Simon Peter and his partners in the fishing trade. They had worked all night and caught nothing. They had given up for the time being and were washing their nets (Lk. 5:1-3). Jesus “borrowed” Peter’s boat from which He taught the crowds who had gathered to hear Him. Afterward Jesus told Peter, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (v.4).

Peter, James, and John, exhausted from a long night of fishing, probably had little enthusiasm for Jesus’ plan; and besides, they were already cleaning their nets. Peter began to inform Jesus of their efforts and lack of success but quickly pivoted from his negativity by saying, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net” (v.5). Peter’s professional expertise and opinion told him one thing while his faith in the Master told him the opposite. The result was such that they had to call for a second boat and crew to secure the catch.

Truly a great miracle occurred that day, causing Peter to fall down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (v.8). Peter had previously seen Jesus’ “beginning of signs” when He turned water into wine at a wedding feast (Jn. 2:2,11), and had witnessed the healing of his own mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38-39), but it was this miracle that caused him (and his partners) to forsake all and follow the Lord (v.11).

I have to wonder how differently Peter’s life would have been had he stubbornly insisted that letting down the net would be useless. And I shudder to wonder how many times I (or others) may have used the “we’ve tried that before” excuse when some enthusiastic Christian proposes a scriptural method of seeking the lost. Yes, I know that’s not quite the same as arguing with Jesus, but if it means that we end up doing nothing in reaching people with the gospel, it’s similar.

Not understanding the “why” of God’s command or prohibition has been a problem from the beginning. Eve was well aware of what God had commanded concerning the fruit from the tree in the midst of the garden; but after hearing the devil’s lie, she “saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). She acted on what she thought was harmless.

The Bible is filled with examples of people—even God’s people—trying to outsmart God. In fact, in almost every case of sin, the sinner acted on his own judgment rather than saying, “Nevertheless at Your word I will, or will not...”

Many people fail to see the harm in some of the things that God has clearly condemned. This is especially true regarding personal behaviors and relationships. Many young people (and some old people) try to justify sexual activity outside of marriage

as harmless despite the warning that “fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). Most of the world is ignoring the inspired warnings against homosexual behavior revealed in the first chapter of Romans. Why? Because they think there’s no harm in such behavior. Instead of taking the “Nevertheless at Your word” attitude, most people go ahead and do what seems right in their own eyes.

If we’re honest with ourselves, we will probably have to admit that we don’t fully understand God’s reasons behind some things that He has commanded or condemned. God’s commandments are “just and good” (Rom. 7:12). I am convinced that they are for mankind’s good, whether we understand why or not. When we fail to see or understand the reasons for God’s commands, let us join Peter in saying, “Nevertheless at your word I will...”

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‘I Fed You With Milk’

By **KARL DIESTELKAMP**

WHEN TIMES ARE HARD and stressful, it can be easy to so focus on those difficulties that spiritual growth takes a backseat and some people coast into inactivity.

In his efforts to strengthen the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said he could not speak to them as being spiritual since they were yet carnal. Using “milk” and “meat” as metaphors, he said that they were unable to tolerate strong teaching (meat), so he fed them with milk, treating them as “babes” (1 Cor. 3:1,2). Their carnal distractions prohibited growth.

Being dull of hearing, the Hebrews not only had not made progress in

their spiritual growth, they had gone backwards to where they had “need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not solid food” (Heb. 5:11-14).

We must put away all carnal things and, “as newborn babes, long for (desire) the spiritual milk which is without guile, that [we] may grow thereby unto salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2). Have we lost our appetite for the pure word of God? Lest we forget: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18).

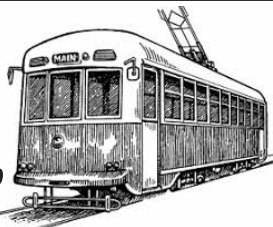
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HOW TO BLESS OTHERS

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

BIBLICAL BLESSING generally takes three forms: people are blessed by God (e.g. Num. 6:24-26), God is blessed by people (e.g. Lk. 1:68), and people are blessed by people (e.g. Lk. 6:28). Let's look at that last one. When is the last time you blessed another person? Maybe you said, "God bless you" when someone sneezed or, "Bless their heart" when you mentioned something unflattering about someone, but these don't really meet the biblical standard for blessing. We know we're supposed to bless others, but how do we do it?

'Stop the Car!'



I KNOW THIS WILL "DATE" ME, but I remember as a child several occasions on which our family would have to take a streetcar to go to worship. For the benefit of young ones who read this, a streetcar was like a bus that ran on railroad tracks that were in the middle of busy streets. Yes, we had a family car; but when my father would be away preaching in gospel meetings, we would have to find another means of transportation.

I was reminded of this pleasant experience when I read an old story about a small boy who was riding home from church on a streetcar. He was delighted with the picture story card he had received in Bible class that morning. The message on the card was, "Have faith in God."

On his way home, his precious possession slipped from his fingers and fluttered out the open window of the streetcar onto the pavement. With a cry of distress he shouted, "Stop the car! I've lost my faith in God!"

The good-natured conductor signaled and the card was recovered amid smiles of the other passengers. One passenger commented about the blessed innocence of childhood. Another noted that there would be many happier and truer lives if we older ones would call a halt when we find ourselves rushing ahead on some road where we are in danger of leaving our faith in God behind.

~Al Diestelkamp

The word *bless* can have several related meanings based on biblical usage:

To give thanks:

In the feeding of the five thousand, Luke 9:16 says that Jesus blessed the loaves and fish. John 6:11 says that He gave thanks for them because it can have the same meaning (cp. Matt.. 26:26 and Lk. 22:19).

To say something good:

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12). Blessing is the opposite of cursing (saying something bad to or wishing ill upon someone). It is actually translated "praise" in some places (Ex: Lk. 1:64).

To give something good:

God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Being blessed is to receive something good. Blessing someone is giving them something good.

To express the wish for something good for others:

Boaz greeted his harvesters with, "The Lord be with you!" and they responded, "The Lord bless you!" (Ruth 2:4). Blessing tells someone that you want good things to happen to them. You want God to give someone what is good.

Peter reminds us that we are called to bless, even when others do evil and insult us. The temptation is to "repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling" (1 Pet. 3:9 ESV), but we must resist and bless. However, there is another, more insidious way of failing our call to bless others: doing or saying nothing. In refraining to curse and do evil to others we still haven't given them a blessing. We withhold something negative without supplying something positive.

In every situation we need to be looking for ways to bless others. We'll need to intentionally look for ways because it won't always be obvious or feel natural. We need to ask ourselves if there is something for which we can give thanks and then do it. That's blessing. We need to look past the evil of others and do or say something good. That's blessing. We can give good things that are needed even to the ungrateful and undeserving. That's blessing. And, in the most challenging situations, we can still express our desire that others will receive

good from God (even when they reject it from us). That's blessing.

This is what we see in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:44: "But I say to you, 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." We love and bless those who oppose us by doing good to them and praying for them. Notice that this has more to do with our hearts and attitudes and less to do with who the others are or what they do.

Blessing others is about changing our hearts to be like God's heart. Jesus said that loving our enemies and blessing those who curse us makes us "sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). He went on to say that only loving and blessing those who love and bless us is no better than what sinners do. It doesn't feel great to bless those who curse us. It's hard. It requires self-control, thoughtfulness, and looking at things spiritually rather than just physically. But isn't that what being "sons of your Father in heaven" is really about?

Christians have two powerful motivations to bless others. First, God richly blesses the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). As His children, we will exhibit this family trait, following His example (1 Pet. 2:23). James reminds us that we must not "bless God" and curse men who have been made in God's likeness (Jas. 3:9). Our primary motivations are being Christ-like and knowing that other's are made in the image of God. Second, we are called to bless in all situations and, in doing so, we are inheriting a blessing (1 Pet. 3:9). Our eternal blessing is so great that it motivates us to bless all others—worthy or unworthy—since sharing this blessing only increases it, no matter how others respond. We bless and desire that God bless others because we are so blessed in Christ.

Romans 12:9 contains an important warning: "Let love be without hypocrisy..." God is not prescribing an empty, trite response so we can say we gave a blessing to others. Our love for others must be "genuine" (ESV) and "sincere" (NIV). No matter what we do or say, it's not love if we don't mean it. It's not blessing if we don't want them to be blessed or if it is a passive aggressive attempt to manipulate them. And we must not bless them to their face but curse them behind their backs. Don't wish them God's blessing in public but privately hope that God curses them.

"You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way..." (2 Cor. 9:11). We are blessed to bless.

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A Personal Connection to Christ is Not Private

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

IT IS POPULAR TO THINK that one's relationship with Christ is *personal*, yet clarification is needed as to what this means. *Personal* often carries with it the connotation of a *private* and/or unique relationship that excludes others. Thus, to an inquiry about a delicate topic, someone might reply that it is "none of your business" on the grounds that it is *personal*. However, *personal* can also mean particularly involved or connected to someone or something. Thus, to say you put in a *personal* appearance at an event or received a *personal* invitation does not necessarily mean that it was private but was specific and particular.

It is important that a relationship with Jesus Christ be *personal* in the sense that each Christian is specifically and particularly connected to Jesus through His gracious sacrifice on his/her behalf and his/her faithful response to His invitation. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26,27). The intimacy of trust (faith) "in Christ Jesus" to the extent that we "put on Christ" in baptism certainly conveys that one is personally connected with Christ. "As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His

death...we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (Rom. 6:3,4). Our relationship with Jesus is nothing if it is not personal. However, Jesus never intended His relationship with us to be private, secret, or unshared with others.

A personal relationship with Jesus, while critical for our own salvation, actually connects us to others who are also personally connected to Jesus. This is clearly illustrated in what Paul refers to as "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12) of which Christ is head (v. 15) and Paul further describes as, "the whole body, joined and knit together by what *every joint* supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part* does its share, caus[ing] growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (v. 16).

This describes the unity to which all followers of Christ are called in "one body" (vv. 1-6). Being united with Christ means being united with others. We can't have a *personal* relationship with Christ without being a part of His body, His people, His church (1:22,23).

Our personal connection to Christ impacts our connections to one another. In writing to the carnally-divided group of Christians in Corinth, Paul had to remind everyone that because Christ is *not* divided, neither should they be divided (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3,4). Yet division was (and still

is) rampant among professing Christians because of worldly attitudes and behaviors which do not conform to Christ.

Paul also used the "body" imagery to illustrate and remind the saints in Corinth of the practical value of diversity of function even as there is unity of faith and purpose (12:12-31). So, while "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...the body is not one member but many" (vv. 13,14). Christians always need to remember that we "are the body of Christ, and members individually" (v. 27). Paul is not saying that the group in Corinth (or any such group) constituted "the body of Christ," but he is using the saints' professed common connection to Christ's body to challenge them to work together with one another in a way that is Christ-like and in accord with the mind of Christ.

Being reminded of our personal connection to Christ in His body equips us for the work of service in the many other relationships we have including our marriages, households, working relationships, local congregations, and even those outside of Christ (cf. Col. 3:1-4:6). One's relationship with Christ is personal but not private because, ideally, it connects Christians to one another and seeks to share the gospel so that others will likewise connect to Jesus Christ.

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Galatians 6:10 in Context

By STEVE FONTENOT

THEFORE, AS WE HAVE OPPORTUNITY, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). As with any scripture, this must be interpreted *according to its context*. Ignoring context, materialists use the biblical statement "the dead do not know anything" (Eccl. 9:5) to teach that people are unconscious after death. Many use "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Ac. 16:31) in support of salvation by "faith only," not considering its following context. Let us not make a similar mistake with our text.

The doctrinal issue of whether or not Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved was addressed in this letter to the Galatian churches. When doctrinal issues are surging, brethren sometimes begin fighting one another rather than fighting the error. In chapter 5, Paul urges these brethren to serve one another out of love, not to "bite and devour one another" (vv.13-15). The law, "*love your neighbor*," demands we "serve" rather

than "bite." One does a fellow man *good*; the other destroys him.

He then contrasts "works of the flesh" with the "fruit of the Spirit" which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," challenging them to "walk by the Spirit." (5:16-26) The works of the flesh promote "biting and devouring," but the fruit of the Spirit promotes "serving" for another's *good*.

Brethren are "neighbors" but more than neighbors. They also have a *special* relationship "in Christ." Paul, in the verses before our text, discusses ways brethren should "serve" *one another*: restoring the fallen (v.1); bearing one another's burdens (v.2); not overestimating ourselves (vv.3-5); and cooperating with the teacher (v.6).

In verses 6-9, Paul warns and encourages. He warns against deceiving oneself about the evil of "sowing to the flesh" and encourages perseverance in "doing *good*." Contextually, "sowing to the *flesh*" refers to the selfish and unloving treatment of our fellow man prohibited beginning in 5:13, "do not turn your freedom into an oppor-

tunity for the *flesh*..." and characterized by the "works of the *flesh*" (5:19f). Contextually, "doing *good*," by contrast, refers to serving one another from love as required of neighbors by the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14) and to affording special opportunities toward brethren (6:1f).

Then in our text, Paul sums up: "So then..." indicating that what he says here about doing *good* is based on the previous context. "While we have opportunity" we are to fulfill our responsibilities as "neighbors"—"doing *good* to all men"—and if to neighbors, how much more ("especially") do we have the responsibility to "do *good*" to one who is not only our neighbor but also our brother in the "household of faith."

To use Galatians 6:10 to authorize church benevolence to the world's needy is foreign to the context, confuses the grounds of the moral obligations here demanded, and ignores the unique nature and work of the collective God instituted for saints to provide for duties "in Christ," the church "of Christ."

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Articles From the Days Gone By

'I Will Lay My Hand Upon My Mouth'

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

JOB SAID IT (Job 40:4). God had just finished asking Job a lot of hard questions. As far as God was concerned, the questions were simple; but Job could not answer one of them. The questions were obviously intended to humble Job, and the result was exactly what God intended. Previously Job had been "righteous in his own eyes" (32:1). He had "justified himself rather than God" (32:2). Indeed, Job was a great man of patience, but he lacked humility. But after God asked many hard questions, Job said, "I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth."

Christians today are told to "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Indeed, Christians must know that they are saved (Heb. 8:11), and they must know how this is accomplished. But we must answer with meekness, not arrogance.

Perhaps most of us have heard preach-

ers declare that they would give an answer "without fear of contradiction by any man here or anywhere else!" The statement had a confident ring to it. We were supposed to relax and say to ourselves, "This man really knows his lesson. He is a real defender of the truth. He will put the enemy down." Really? No, it never did have that effect upon me. It seems to me that one who has such superior knowledge would not need to tell us that he had it. I wondered if he should not put a hand upon his mouth—before somebody else did it for him!

A long, long time ago when I was a young preacher, sweet old ladies would ask me, "What will our bodies be like after the resurrection?" Or, "What is 'the day' in 'when you see the day approaching' in Hebrews 10:25?" Or, "What is the baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29?" I felt that I had to answer. Failure to answer would mean that I didn't know very much! (And I didn't know much but didn't want them to think I didn't). Perhaps most preachers have had similar experiences.

Yes, it is now easier for me to answer.

That doesn't mean that I can solve all the hard questions—not at all. But it is quite easy for me to say, "I don't know the answer for sure, but let us study it together."

The apparent arrogance that seems to be manifested by some preachers may be the fault of those who ask the questions. If an experienced preacher fails to assert a dogmatic answer, people may say he is just being humble about it. If an old preacher fails, they may say he has just forgotten! But if a young preacher fails, they may say he is ignorant.

But we must not be evasive. We must not vacillate (waver). We must know the truth that will then make us free (Jn. 8:32). But we also need to "be swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jas. 1:19). And we must remember that unrevealed things belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29) and content ourselves with those things that are revealed. Even regarding revealed things, no man can answer every question and, sometimes, each of us should *put his hand upon his mouth*.

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