

For you have need
of endurance, so
that after you have
done the will of *God*,
you may receive the
promise

HEBREWS 10:36

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Christ's Cross Curbs Complaint

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

THE MORE WE STUDY God's Word, the more we see intentional patterns. Though many err by reading *into* Scripture more than God has revealed or intended, let us not be blind to "what-ever things were written before" as they foreshadow God's eternal plan "that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Thus, examining how God interacted with man (and specifically with the children of Israel) provides us, who claim to be His children, with information that is helpful to our walk with Him.

From its deliverance from slavery in Egypt to its journey to the promised land of rest, the nation of Israel faced challenges which have parallels in our lives. In that exodus and wilderness sojourn are numerous lessons to be learned about faith and perseverance which can help us on our own journeys in this present life.

Complaining comes easy. The demands of life are opportunities for the building of faith and perseverance, yet they are the occasions for many of our complaints. When Moses boldly came to the defense of a fellow Hebrew, no doubt his courage was appreciated. Yet when those characteristics of leadership were applied to a Hebrew *brother*, it was met with complaint (Ex. 2:11-14).

We welcome leadership as long as it requires little of us. Leadership is great for correcting the other guy; but when it leads where we do not wish to go, *then* we complain. Forty years later when Moses returned to Egypt to call for Israel's release from captivity, Pharaoh's initial response made things harder for Israel and caused many to complain against *Moses* (5:21). When correction, improvement, or reformation of any kind is needed, things often get worse before getting better. These are

the times that try men's souls and reveal the character of those who suffer. These are the times we faithlessly complain.

After Israel plundered Egypt in their exodus, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued Israel. Israel again complained (14:10-12). Even after God's mighty deliverance through the Red Sea and the washing away of their oppressors, they complained about lacking water three days later (15:22-24). God knows water! He *does* water. Instead of complaining, why not *ask* Him for water? A month later they complained about food (16:3,4). Are we any different?

Like Israel of old, we "have need of endurance, so that...[we] may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36). Like Moses, we need to refuse the passing pleasures of *this* life, choosing instead to suffer with the people of God (11:24,25), "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (12:2).

When we think of the children of Israel in the wilderness, we see the recurrent theme of God's *grace* despite their complaining. If you have ever taken a road trip with children, you have experienced this in a small way. "How long 'til we get there? I'm hungry. I'm thirsty. I need to go. He's bothering me. She's leaning on me. I'm bored. *How* long 'til we get there?" Children often lack appreciation for what they have (modern transportation, climate control, rest areas, snack foods, cloth covered seats, entertainment systems), focus on their discomforts, and impatiently complain.

The children of Israel were no different. Forgetting their freedom from bondage and failing to look forward to the Promised Land, their present trials, delays, and uncertainties became the focus of their complaints. Just over three months after their exodus (cf. Ex. 19:1; 24:18), the people

became impatient with Moses' absence on Mt. Sinai. They complained and turned to idolatry. Though invoking Yahweh's name, their motives were more about eating, drinking, and playing than worshiping God (32:1-6). Absent the golden calf, much of modern "worship" springs from the same source—the complaints of immature, impatient, and discontent hearts. Beware!

However, the absolute low point for the first generation of freed Israelites was their response to the report of those sent to spy out the promised land. All twelve spies agreed the land was just as promised, "flowing with milk and honey" (33:3; Num. 13:27). However, ten of the twelve spies did not believe Israel was capable of taking the land because of the strength of its inhabitants (vv 28-33). The response of the people was *more* faithless complaining (14:1-4). They said they would have preferred to die in Egypt or in the wilderness rather than fight for what God was graciously giving them. When Joshua and Caleb reminded the people that God was with them, and that they should not fear the Canaanites, "the congregation said to stone them" (vv 6-10). Beware! Faithless complaining drives people to want to kill the faithful messengers who call them back to faith.

God's response to Israel's chronic complaining was to suggest disinheriting the entire nation and starting over with Moses (vv 11,12). Moses' response was to intercede for Israel, begging God to "Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (v 19). The uninitiated might see Moses as being more gracious than God; but this would be a failure to look beyond Moses (the shadow) to the grace of the cross of Christ (cf. Dt. 18:15-19; Ac. 3:19-26).

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When Nothing Becomes Something

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

FIRST CORINTHIANS 8:4 states what most of us would say is fundamental to our faith: "...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is no other God but one*." Idols, both the physical objects representing their deities and the deities themselves, are "nothing."

The Psalmist well expresses our faith in Psalm 135:5-7:

"For I know that the LORD is great,
And our Lord is above all gods.
Whatever the LORD pleases He does,
In heaven and in earth,
In the seas and in all deep places.
He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;
He makes lightning for the rain;
He brings the wind out of His treasures."

The Psalmist then states what we know about idols in Psalm 135:15-18:

"The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;
Nor is there any breath in their mouths.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them."

Although literal idolatry seems wrong almost to the point of being silly to us, it is currently growing. For example, the number of Hindus in America is expected to double in the next 25 years to nearly 6 million. Curiosity in eastern religions will be piqued by those looking for alternatives to traditional religions; people will be meeting people involved in idolatry; and we will begin seeing it practiced in popular entertainment media. We need to prepare to show and warn that "an idol is nothing" and these "so-called gods" are not God at all (1 Co 8:4-5).

Currently, traditional idolatry is probably not very tempting to most of us, so we probably pay little attention to the charge, "Flee idolatry" in 1 Corinthians 10:14. But fleeing includes the things related to it. It includes anything we trust and ask and depend on that replaces God.

I was in a bookstore and was struck by the number of books about tarot, healing crystals, magic candle burning, and psychic powers. I know none of this is new, but there seems to be renewed interest. It is repackaged idolatry and occult as "therapeutic power," "ancient art," and "connecting with yourself to live mindfully." Who doesn't want power, art, and mindful connection in their life? It's tempting. We know it's "nothing," so what can it hurt?

Paul wrote that we know idols are nothing as a reminder so we won't make nothing

into something! We must not say they are nothing but then dabble in them because others are, because they might work (or won't hurt), or because they're fun. We flee idolatry and things associated with the "so-called god" and powers. But what if you don't flee?

First, dabbling in the occult makes nothing become something by failing to glorify the one true and living God. It gives power to something other than to Him and prayer. Second, connection to an idol makes nothing become something by being a stumbling block to someone weak in faith who is struggling to put their faith wholly in God and not in powers that are "so-called gods." (1 Co 10:14-33) Third, what

is nothing becomes something anytime we ourselves start to think these powers are somehow real and produce results

"What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" (1 Co 10:19-22).

We know nothing is nothing. So, have nothing to do with it.

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'A Non-Denominational Denomination'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

OUR CLAIM THAT churches of Christ are not a part of a denomination has been generally ignored and disbelieved by others. I'm willing to admit that I and other brethren may have contributed to this disbelief. Even my use of the words "our claim" at the beginning of this article may leave the impression of an organizational tie that doesn't exist—although, even the apostle Paul makes reference to "our people" (Tit. 3:14). But, in the minds of many, "If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck..." You know the rest.

I am often amused by *The Babylon Bee*, a website that offers satirical commentary about current events—especially politics and religion. The editors occasionally take a somewhat friendly jab at "Churches of Christ"—usually about the lack of instrumental music. Some time ago *The Bee* published "A Guide to Every Christian Denomination" in which they described "Churches of Christ" as "Another non-denominational denomination. They love the Bible and full-immersion baptism as much as they hate musical instruments." They have obviously heard the non-denominational claim but are not convinced.

What is it that makes "churches of Christ" look like just one among many denominations? In a world familiar with businesses having branches using common logos and trademarks in their advertising, it is expected that those businesses are directed by a central organization. For example, when we see golden arches, we assume we are seeing a McDonalds restaurant that is affiliated organizationally with a parent

corporation. Even independently-owned McDonalds are merely franchises of the larger corporation which exercises a certain amount of control. Exclusive use of "Church of Christ" on signs in advertising, and in conversations may lead to a misunderstanding of the undenominational nature of the church of our Lord.

I have long advocated using various ways of identifying local churches belonging to Christ. Even in advertising, I've often chosen other scriptural descriptions such as "the Lord's church," "Christ's church," or even simply, "the church." Still, most people think of "Churches of Christ" as just one among many denominations.

By the very definition, a denomination is one part of a larger entity. For instance, our nation's currency is divided into several denominations—\$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, etc. Even though each denomination is different, they are all U.S. currency. The body of Christ is not divided into denominations.

Churches that are part of a denomination are answerable to the hierarchy of that body. This was recently illustrated when a local church affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention was ousted by its governing board due to the ordination of a woman "pastor"—a violation of that body's by-laws. It is Jesus Christ who decides whether a church's "lampstand" remains (Rev. 2:5), and He determines whose names are in the "Book of Life" (Rev. 3:5) and are a part of His church.

Finally, although it's frustrating when people don't accept our claim of being undenominational, the important thing is that, as followers of Jesus, we be that.

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"LEAVING THE CHURCH"

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

IF YOU READ A NEWS ARTICLE from a worldly source wherein "the church" is referenced without any modifiers, you would probably understand *church* in its broadest sense as it is often used by the media. Context, as always, would be key to understanding what is actually meant. For example, when talking about "the church" versus "the state," one is often talking theoretically about how two social forces might interact with one another. In this case, "the church" might broadly refer to a worldview of faith in God. The word *church* is not used this way in Scripture, but contextually we understand what people mean.

"The church" might also be used to refer to culturally dominant institutions which imagine themselves as representing the church universal. In such cases, "The church said..." would be referencing the hierarchies of such institutions. Even those who protest such churches still speak of "the church" in general ways that are inclusive of all who profess some kind of faith in Jesus Christ (aka Christendom).

Certainly, *church* (*ekklesia*) is used biblically in a universal sense to refer to the one body of Christ comprised of individual saints redeemed by Christ's blood (e.g. Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4,16). This is the church which Jesus said He would build (Mt. 16:18). However, just as "the gates of Hades" cannot prevail against Christ's church, neither is His church subject to nor discernible by human metrics. "The church" in this universal sense has no visible head or hierarchy on earth which speaks for it. Christ is its head, and He has spoken; His words and His will have been communicated to us by His apostles and prophets (cf. Eph. 2:20).

Scripture also uses the word *ekklesia* in another distinct way to refer to multiple groups of Christians in different locales. There is *the one* church and then there are many *churches*. Some explain this apparent discrepancy in number by saying that the *one* (universal) church is comprised of many local churches. However, the simpler explanation is that the word *ekklesia* is used in two distinct ways with no implication that the one is made up of the many. The use of the same word *ekklesia* no more implies an organic relationship between all *ekklesiai* than would the common use of the English word *group* imply an organic relationship between all groups.

We do find "the church" being used in a universal sense to refer to specific members of the one body (e.g. Ac. 9:31), but nothing in this context nor in the rest of Scripture implies that the one church is comprised

of local churches. Consistently, individual saints (not churches) are portrayed as "members" comprising the one body of Christ (Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27; Eph. 4:11-16).

So, when people announce that they are "leaving the church," to which *church* are they referring? Some might be declaring that they are "leaving the church" in the universal sense which would mean renouncing Jesus as their head (i.e. they are no longer believers in Jesus as the risen Son of God). If a person leaves "the church," then he/she *has* left Christ's one body (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18) and are without hope.

Others might have no thought of abandoning Jesus Christ but mean that they are leaving *a* specific local group of Christians. Yet, the use of the definite article *the* suggests they are *not* talking about merely leaving *a* local church to join themselves to *a* different local group. It sounds like they are talking about leaving some group bigger than any one local church but smaller than the body of Christ.

Practically speaking, what some mean when they talk about themselves or others "leaving *the* church" reveals a denominational way of thinking. In a formal sense, a *denomination* is "a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local churches." While using *church* in this denominational way is perfectly good English (and understandable in a world that has come to accept denominations as the norm), *church* is never used in Scripture to refer to a group of churches. It is consistently used to refer to a group of individual people (saints).

The tendency to denominate religious groups has much historical precedent but has *no* biblical precedent. Many of us have seen charts which graphically portray the alleged branches of Christendom and show the streams of thought from whence all denominations came. Most people accept this denominational use of the word *church* as a practical reality despite the fact it is without biblical sanction or support.

Of course, there *are* people who rightly resist such denominational tendencies. Yet, some of these same people zealously go so far as to claim that *their* local church is part of the one church which was established in A.D. 33. This over-zealous claim contributes to the unscriptural idea that the *one* body of Christ *is* comprised of local churches. It essentially suggests that the one church of Christ is itself a denomination (a body of churches) set apart from all the other denominations.

Those with a sincere desire to reject inherently-divisive denominational thinking and restore scriptural thinking about "the

church" need first to be clear on which church it is they are trying to restore. The *one* church—the body of Christ over which not even Hades can prevail—has *never* been in need of any kind of reformation or restoration. *People* who leave this church certainly need restoration; but the church of Jesus Christ remains sound regardless. In contrast, the many local churches which rise and fall over time may need reformation or restoration to biblical values and patterns (as we see exemplified by Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia - Revelation 2,3); but the one body of Christ remains pure and undivided (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13).

Any "restoration movement" based upon Scripture must recognize and acknowledge this distinction between *the* one church and the many local churches if such restoration is to be sustained among the many churches from generation to generation. If this distinction is *not* maintained, 1) any "restoration movement" will eventually become its own entity acknowledging only those churches which subscribe to the views of the movement, and 2) that entity will then assume that its churches essentially constitute *the* one true church.

Warning: many current denominations began with similar idealistic motives to reform or restore people and their churches to the apostolic traditions and patterns preserved in Scripture. So while saints in any local church ought to abide in the doctrine of Christ and exemplify the unity of the one body of Christ, neither their local fellowship nor any idealistic grouping of such "sound" local churches constitute or comprise *the* body of Christ.

Speaking of the numerous "churches of Christ" collectively as "the one church" propagates many misconceptions. "Leaving the church" is one of those denominational misconceptions. While one cannot leave *the* one church which Jesus built and expect to prevail over the gates of Hades, one *may* (and may need to) leave any local church (or group of churches) and yet remain a part of the one indivisible body of Christ. So let those who oppose denominational thinking as unscriptural remove the beams from their own eyes before picking out the specks in others. Denominational thinking is not solely a problem of the denominations; it is the tendency of all groups, including "non-denominational" (even "non-institutional") churches.

So, let us "leave the church" in its denominational (group of churches) sense and hold fast to Christ alone. To God be glory in *the* church and Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever (Eph. 3:21)!

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"Let love be without hypocrisy."

ROMANS 12:9

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Skunks in the Ark

By AL DIESTELKAMP



IT'S ONLY AN EXCUSE aimed at avoiding personal responsibility, but we occasionally hear the charge that "there are hypocrites in the church." To deny such a charge would be fruitless considering the fact that churches are made up of fallible people, including some who may seek the fellowship of faithful Christians for nefarious reasons.

The Jerusalem church had hypocrisy among them as illustrated by the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5). I have no doubt that this story, including God's punishment, is part of the inspired history to serve as a warning for all generations.

Sincere Christians may not always have the ability to see through the hypocrisy of others and, even when it is suspected, hope that spiritual growth will eventually result in sincere repentance.

Hypocrisy is a sin, but it can be forgiven. Indeed, all of us have likely been guilty of it. The apostle Paul had to confront it in the life of Peter regarding his dealings with Gentiles in the presence of Judaizers (Gal. 2:11-13).

It seems there have even been some hypocrites who preached Christ from envy or selfish ambition, hoping to cause trouble for the apostle Paul (Phil. 1:15-16). Though he was not defending the hypocrisy, he recognized its presence among them.

The parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), and Jesus' application (vv. 36-43) suggest that Satan will plant some of his sons among the sons of the kingdom, who will not be "weeded out" until the "harvest" at the end of the age. So, we should not be shocked by their presence among us. Counterfeits are only found among things and places of value.

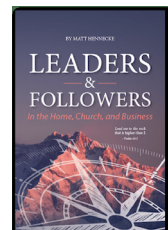
There are hypocrites in every walk of life. However, seldom do we hear of people leaving their employment simply because of a hypocritical employer, or the presence of a few co-workers who don't take their job seriously. And notably, few people refuse to support their favorite sports team just because of fair-weather fans.

It might be wise to take note of the fact that a couple of stinking skunks didn't drive Noah and his family out of the ark.

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LEADERS & FOLLOWERS in the Home, Church, and Business by Matt Hennecke

There are well over 15,000 books on the subject of leadership, but how many have been written about what makes a good follower? Leadership dominates our thinking while followership is largely ignored. But you can't talk intelligently about leadership without also talking about followers.



This book, written by Matt Hennecke, brings the two roles together and charts new territory in understanding what makes effective leaders and engaged followers. Based on four decades of helping develop leaders in the business world, and his deep study of the Word of God, Matt provides practical insights and usable tools to remove much of the mystery of what makes a good leader and follower. This is a useful book for parents, elders, and church members. In its pages you'll discover the "crucial factor" of leadership and identify different types of followers and the five leadership styles needed to guide them. You'll learn, from Christ's example, how to become a "servant leader" and unlock the potential of followers. Hopefully, this book will help you in being a better leader as well as a better follower. It is available from One-Stone, FC Bookstore, and Amazon.