



## GOD IS LOVE

A man placed a sign on his weather vane that read, "God is Love." A skeptic neighbor asked, "Do you mean that God's love is as changeable as the wind?" "No," replied the man, "I mean that God is love which ever way the wind blows."

# THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

Volume 24

October-November-December, 1993

Number 4

## Four Scriptural Reasons To Miss Services

By MATT HENNECKE

I've finally found it! For years I've been puzzled and amazed by the poor attendance of Christians at worship services and Bible studies. It seems more and more Christians have discovered more and more "good" reasons to be other places than assembled with other Christians. Work, school events, ball practice, fatigue, headache, vacations, parties—you name it and Christians everywhere are using it to justify being somewhere else on the first day of the week. Through careful Bible study, however, I think I've found at least four *scriptural* reasons to miss worship services.

### • Good Reason #1:

#### *Being Deep in Thought*

Many times a train of thought is derailed because of the distraction created by a church assembly. This often happens to me on Wednesday nights. I'll be at work struggling with some task and before I'm finished I've got to drop everything and go to Bible study. Anyone who has business to do or meetings to attend can attest to the disruption and nuisance Bible study can be. It's hard to pick up a train of thought once we've been interrupted.

Bible study or worship can also get in the way of homework. If you're working on a term paper and are deep in thought, it's hard to stop what you're doing and find time to worship God or study His word. There is, however, scriptural justification for missing services if one is deep in thought!

### • Good Reason #2:

#### *Being Busy*

There are many chores requiring our attention and not all of them require a lot of

thought. In fact, most household tasks don't require much thought at all. They're simply boring and tedious. Mowing the lawn is a good example. I've got a couple of acres and it takes me three or four hours to get it all mowed. Sometimes I get a late start and before I can finish I feel the pressure of some scheduled church service. In the past I've had to interrupt the task, go to church and then return to finish.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just work through the assembly and get the tedious chore completed without interruption? I've discovered a passage that makes it clear that missing services is justified if one is busy!

### • Good Reason #3:

#### *Traveling*

My wife's family lives several hours from us. When we travel to visit them and happen to schedule our departure for a Sunday, we have to delay leaving until after church services. Sometimes we even have to stop to worship while in transit. Nothing makes a trip longer than having to stop and worship somewhere. A seven hour trip becomes eight or nine hours. Worshiping with the saints sometimes means going out of our way. One time I was traveling on a Sunday morning through southern Indiana and I had to drive way off course to worship with the saints in Terre Haute.

Vacation travel creates other problems. There are many places in the world I'd like to visit but there aren't any churches nearby. Wouldn't it be nice when traveling not to worry so much about assembling on Sunday? Wouldn't it be nice to go on a fishing trip into the Canadian Rockies and not have to locate a local church? Well, I believe I've found a passage in the Bible that allows one to miss services if one is traveling!

### • Good Reason #4:

#### *Oversleeping*

That alarm clock seems to go off awfully early on Sunday morning. Even though I get up much earlier during the work week, there is just something about Sunday mornings. I could easily sleep another hour. Like most Christians, though, I pull myself out of bed and make preparations to be assembled with the saints for Bible study and worship services. In recent years, though, I've noticed that more of my brothers and sisters are getting that extra hour of sleep. They stagger into the building just before worship and make no excuses about skipping Bible study. Their uncaring attitude used to really bother me. Not any more. I've learned there is scriptural justification for missing services if one is sleeping!

### *The Scriptural Justification*

In 1 Kings 18:22-39 we are told of a showdown between Elijah, the prophet of God, and four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Two bulls are chosen. One for Baal, one for Jehovah. Preparations are made for a burnt offering. Everything's ready except for the fire. Then Elijah issues the challenge: "The god who answers by fire—he is God" (vs. 24). Baal's followers assemble. Worship services begin. The people call for Baal. They shout. They dance. But he doesn't arrive! Then, Elijah taunts Baal's followers by suggesting four possible reasons their god has missed worship services: "*Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened*" (vs. 27).

As I see it, these four scriptural reasons for missing services are good reasons if you're a false god. And, it seems, good reasons if you're a false Christian . . .

# Two Walking Together

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The prophet, Amos, long ago asked the rhetorical question: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). When people disagree, unity is possible only when one or the other is *willing* and *able* to compromise. Even in the physical realm, a short-legged man and a long-legged man can walk together only if the long-legged man cooperates. The short-legged man may extend his steps to try to keep up, but there is a limit to how far he can stretch his legs. On the other hand, the long-legged man may find it uncomfortable to shorten his steps, but if he *wants* to walk with the short-legged man, he will.

In spiritual matters "accommodation" is good and right so long as the truth is not compromised. In most doctrinal issues, brethren can still walk together because one of them can "shorten his step" to match the other. Of course, if the long-legged brother is unwilling to accommodate his shorter brother, they cannot walk together.

The apostle Paul illustrated for us the application of this principle, using the "eating of food offered to idols" issue. He said, "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4). In this matter Paul was the long-legged brother. However, he recognized the fact that "there is not in everyone that knowledge" (1 Cor. 8:7). In other words, there were some with shorter legs than he. He realized that if he was going to walk together with these more conservative brethren, he was going to have to adjust his step so as not to cause them to violate their consciences. Paul was so concerned about his brethren that he declared, "if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13).

A similar lesson is taught in another of Paul's letters. Evidently some had concluded that it was sinful to eat meat. They could not do so without violating their consciences. Even though Paul makes it clear that "there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14), he goes on to appeal to his fellow "long-legs" to adjust their walk so as not to "destroy the work of God for the sake of food" (Rom. 14:20). He was calling for compromise in practice from those who *could* compromise without engaging in sin. Notice he did not call for compromise by those who were not yet convinced that eating meat was right. In fact, he said, "he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

Occasionally I will hear some say that the teachings of Romans 14 can only be applied in matters of opinion, and cannot be

used in any doctrinal discussion. Do you really think the brethren who thought it was sinful to eat meat considered it only a matter of opinion? If the weaker Roman brethren believed Paul to be an apostle of Christ, this issue should have been resolved after the letter was received. However, I have the idea that Paul was using the "meat" issue to illustrate a larger point. Until one is convinced a practice is authorized, it remains to be a doctrinal issue, at least in his mind. On the other hand, the one who believes a practice is authorized, but not mandatory, is at liberty to treat it as optional.

There are a few issues which make it impossible for brethren to "walk together" unless they are agreed. I believe it is sinful to sing praises to God with the accompaniment of a mechanical instrument. If a brother doesn't agree with my conviction, we may be able to walk together if he is willing to "shorten his step." However, if he claims it is wrong to sing *without* using an instrument, there is no way we can walk together.

*It's time we realize that  
we can't walk together  
while headed in  
opposite directions*

The divorce and remarriage issue is one which will bring division because of differing convictions. While brethren with opposing views might manage to "walk together" for awhile, whenever an actual situation arises calling for a decision, a division may be necessary.

Suppose a brother acknowledges that before he was a Christian his first wife divorced him for "mental cruelty," and that he subsequently married another woman. I believe Jesus teaches that he is committing adultery with his second wife (Matt. 19:9). Furthermore, I believe I must obey the instructions of the apostle Paul when he says, "not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:11). If some of my brethren think that, because he was baptized after the second marriage, he can (and must) remain with his second wife, we *cannot* "walk together." Let me emphasize that both are not right. In fact, Paul, noting the reality of divisions, wrote, "there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" (1 Cor. 11:19).

Failure to teach on the subject of divorce and remarriage will bring disaster to a congregation. Even when you do teach on the

subject, there will be those who silently disagree. They may be willing to remain "in the closet" until such a time when disciplinary action is called for. However, if you have taught consistently, there will be other brethren who will be prepared to stand against error even if it means starting over in a home, a hall or a storefront.

## Divorce & Remarriage Issue Forces Division in Sycamore, Illinois

By AL DIESTELKAMP

For years we have known that many congregations of the Lord's people were in danger of dividing over the divorce and remarriage issue. It has happened in Sycamore, Illinois, where I have preached for more than five years. Though I periodically taught on the subject (with little or no opposition) throughout the whole time, when what had been a "hypothetical situation" became a *real* case to be dealt with, the division took place.

We were faced with a situation in which some of us believed we *could not* continue to have fellowship with two members, while others believed we *must* have fellowship with them. Efforts were made to study with the couple who were the focus of the controversy, but as a result of advice they had received from other members of the congregation, they refused to study with anyone who had questions about their remarriage. The offers we made to study with those who supported the remarriage in question were also refused. After our November business meeting it became evident that we had to start over.

On Wednesday, November 10th, we announced the formation of a new congregation to begin meeting the following Sunday, November 14th. The first Sunday we had 36 in attendance in the morning and 35 in the evening. Of course, we regret that the division was necessary, but it was not the result of an overnight decision. For many months we tried to maintain peace while holding to the truth. I believe the new congregation will do well in the long run. Already, the less stressful environment is apparent, and we have reason for joy and optimism.

The new congregation meets in the Oddfellows Hall, 131 N. Sabin St., Sycamore, Illinois. Sunday Bible classes are at 9 a.m.; Sunday morning worship at 10 a.m. and evening worship at 5 p.m.; Wednesday Bible classes are at 7 p.m. For more information, call (815) 756-9840.



# SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Suppose a phone call came in to a hospital in which the caller began to describe all the troubles her family had faced, leading up to asking if the hospital could possibly spare some funds to help her with her utility bills. The switchboard operator would politely tell him he had the wrong number, informing him, "This is a hospital."

Or, imagine a call being made to a college or university in which the caller tells how he and his family are on their way from Ohio to Montana (where a job is awaiting him) and asking if he could get some help with a badly needed car repair. The person answering the call would likely say, "You must have misdialed; this is not a car repair place."

I have not checked with the switchboard operators at such institutions to see if they ever get such calls, but I doubt it! I also doubt it if auto repair shops and utility companies receive calls asking for food for needy families. Why? Because those who need such help understand that it is not a part of the work of a hospital to pay the electric bills of the poor, nor is a college expected to help with emergency car repairs of strangers. They know that auto mechanics and phone companies don't have funds available to help with food for needy families, and so they don't bother to ask them.

Why, then, do churches get calls so often from strangers who are looking for hand-outs? It is because people generally have a misconception about the work of the church as God designed it. Since so many counterfeit churches make benevolence toward the general public a major part of their work, I guess we should not be surprised that people think *all* churches are social agencies.

I am amazed at how brazen some have become who call churches for help. Besides the usual calls for help from the downtrodden, some are becoming quite bold in their requests. I have had numerous requests (usually from single women with children) who expect the church to help pay rent or utilities. When I find out they are not Christians, I know the church cannot help, but because I might be able to help some on a personal basis, I ask for more information. On several occasions I have learned that they have live-in boyfriends. Call me "narrow," but the Lord's going to come before I knowingly help anyone continue in that kind of situation. When I tell them why I can't help, they don't seem to understand and act as if I'm violating their civil rights.

However, there are some legitimate needy people that call for help. When the opportunity arises, I should "do good unto



all" (Gal. 6:10), but I cannot use this instruction—clearly given to individuals—as "authority" for the church to get involved in such work. If God intended for his church to act as an agency to provide relief for the needy of the world, his desire would have been revealed in the written word, either explicitly, by approved example or by implication.

God has authorized the church to work in the area of benevolence, but this authority is limited to the relief of needy saints. By

way of approved examples we see that a local church can provide the physical necessities of its own members (Ac. 4:34; 6:1ff). Furthermore, when the need is beyond the ability of the local church, we find that other local congregations can send funds to that congregation so that it can carry out its responsibility. Lacking is any evidence that God *ever* approved of the church getting involved in relieving the physical needs of the world.

The wisdom of God is shown in this matter. Since there are always natural disasters somewhere in the world, and, given the fact that there will always be poor people (Matt. 26:11), if God had commanded or even authorized the church to work in the area of general benevolence, the primary work of the church would necessarily suffer from a lack of funds. The church is the "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The "higher" work of the church—being spiritual, not physical—is to teach and uphold the truth by way of evangelism and edification.

## Family Values

By ED BRAND

I'm for family values, aren't you? I am for anything which is right and honorable, that will secure real values for the family. After all, each of us has come from a family, and is part of one.

We are having a lot of talk about families today. Legislators, social scientists and engineers, "special interest" groups, all have something to say about the family. Perhaps the American family is about to get a shot in the arm, at long last.

There will be some shots fired alright. However, these shots are not to rejuvenate a worn-out patient, nor are they intended to revive a nearly dead institution. They are intended to destroy one of the most important elements of our nation—a stable family.

You know what a family is, don't you? A husband (father), wife (mother), and children. Children are the normal product of a husband and wife, so we generally use the term "family" to refer to this miniature clan. The English Bible uses it this way (see Num. 26:1-13 as an illustration). When I think, speak or write about "family," this is the way I use the term.

But hold on, because strong winds are blowing to change the meaning of the family. The "family" umbrella is now meant to cover a "faithful" homosexual "commitment"; a "single parent" family

(through adoption or fornication); or simply through cohabitation (called adultery and fornication in the word of God). Most of these arrangements are with the government's blessing, or at least tacit permission. (During the last thirty years welfare has increased 630%, and illegitimate births have increased 560%. Do you suppose there is some relationship between these figures and the new emphasis on family "values"?) These definitions of family are hardly ones I am comfortable with. Are you?

I know that Christians have always been in the minority. Such is true in the USA and in the rest of the world. Now we are in another minority group: the family. Our Bible-based definition of family is being altered. What we mean by family is quickly becoming extinct. We appear to be a vanishing breed.

We should not give up without a fight—a verbal one at least. We must instill in our children, and anyone else who will listen, real "family values." We must seek to perpetuate, by teaching and practice, the divine arrangement found in the word of God. We may not be able to reach everyone, but surely we can speak loudly enough that our families, neighbors and friends can hear us. Some might even be so bold as to challenge our lawmakers and policy-molders. That is, unless we have lost our voice.

# BROTHER AFAR

HAPPENINGS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC & SLOVAKIA

The following are excerpts from reports from Mike Morrow and Charlie Brackett in Prague, Czech Republic, and Rick Liggin and David Diestelkamp in Bratislava, Slovakia.

## Bratislava, Slovakia

We have faced one major setback and disappointment in recent months due to the loss of our translator, Lubo Sarvos. We had high hopes for him—not only as a translator, but more importantly, as a potential Christian. Suddenly and unexpectedly he quit working with us. He didn't tell us he was going to quit—he just quit! Then he sent us a letter giving two reasons for quitting: (1) Personal family problems; and (2) He was tired of religion in general. He added that if there is a God, and if anyone actually has the truth, it is us. But he frankly confessed that he does not believe God exists and that man is the product of evolution. We don't think Lubo has been altogether honest with himself. In working together we got to know him pretty well, and we feel certain that the powerful gospel was affecting him. We think he was beginning to believe in God and didn't like the consequences!

This left us in a difficult situation. We had to cancel some of our studies until we could make other arrangements. But the Lord has provided, and for the present we have been able to use Petr Lengyel. Petr has been studying with us and he and his family have been attending our worship periods as often as his schedule allows. A doctor by profession, he has only a part time position with an area hospital. He speaks English quite well.

During the first week of November we had Ed Brand, of Aurora, Illinois visit with us. We planned three lectures on the inspiration, authority and interpretation of the Bible. He did a superb job of preaching with Petr Lengyel translating. We had visitors at every lecture, and so far, one study has resulted.

## Brno, Czech Republic

We continue to enjoy our work in Brno, involving four individual studies and helping to build up the small church there. The two men who make up that church remain faithful and interested in growing. Charlie Brackett, from Prague, also travels each week to Brno to teach a course to interested faculty members of Brno Masarykove University. His subject is: "The Bible's View of Human Psychology." Under communist rule the faculty had a department of philosophy, promoting communism and atheism. These departments, generally inactive, are used at the faculty chairman's discretion.

## Prague, Czech Republic

Two have been baptized recently. One is an 86-year-old woman who came to our lecture last Spring when Dale Smelser spoke on Catholicism. Later she attended public classes and worship. One Sunday, early in our Bible class, she asked about her infant baptism. The Czech Christians spent the whole period answering and discussing the true nature and purpose of baptism. They did not consult with Americans, or even translate. After class and often the next few Sundays, Milada Labathova was huddled with her, discussing her need and encouraging her to obey. Then Mike Morrow went with Jim and Bobbie Smelser to study with her. Soon after that, on a Sunday morning, she was immersed. Her conversion was a real team effort.

There is evidence of spiritual growth among members. Recently, a man visited our class and worship. That morning Petr Unger preached that teaching obedience is not legalism. At the conclusion our visitor spoke in opposition. For 45 minutes the discussion proceeded without the help of American brethren.

I find myself greeting these signs of maturity with mixed emotions, much like a parent longs for his child to mature and leave the nest, only to

feel apprehension and concern when he does. May God help us remember our role and not forget that He is able to make His servants stand.

There are other signs the church is maturing. The men recently agreed to provide almost half of Petr Unger's support. They also provide full support for Mira Vokal in Ceske Budejovice.

## Voluntary Partners

### Cost of last issue:

Printing & Supplies	\$ 50.00
Domestic Postage	280.39
Foreign Postage	76.88
Return Postage (37)	10.73
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$418.00</b>
Deficit from past issue	32.09
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>- \$450.09</b>

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<b>TOTAL DONATIONS</b>	<b>\$760.00</b>
Deficit from last issue	- 450.09
<b>Funds for this issue</b>	<b>\$310.91</b>

Thanks to all who saw the unusually large deficit reported in the last issue and sent donations. This issue is expected to cost approximately \$420, which would leave a deficit of \$110.09.

# THINK

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Published in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice by Leslie Diestelkamp and family. Distributed free as often and in quantities as ability permits.

**Editor** AL DIESTELKAMP  
414 E. Roosevelt St.  
DeKalb, IL 60115  
(815) 756-9840

**Editor-Emeritus** LESLIE DIESTELKAMP  
1730 W. Galena Blvd., #102W  
Aurora, IL 60506  
(708) 897-6188

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c/o AL DIESTELKAMP  
414 E. Roosevelt St.  
DeKalb, IL 60115

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