

Almost Right

Every once in a while I see a bumper sticker that reads:

**GOD SAID IT • I BELIEVE IT
THAT SETTLES IT!**

While I appreciate what I think is the intended message, it's not quite right. If God has said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not!

—Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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ELITISM IN THE CHURCH

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Elitism is defined as "government or control by a select group." In the body of Christ, Jesus and his apostles are an elite group. The church in its distributive sense (universal) has no place for modern-day elitism. No faithful Christian would intentionally become an elitist.

For some time I have been concerned that a few brethren who have been very aggressive in resisting and fighting what they have perceived to be error, would begin to show signs of elitism.

Allow me to express my qualms about some practices and attitudes which seem to be evidence that my fears are justified:

The Elevation of Men

I purchased a copy of a booklet which, reportedly, has been a best-seller among brethren. It is a transcription of a sermon in which the preacher is warning of trends among brethren which he believes will ultimately lead to full-scale apostasy.

This is not intended to be a review of the actual sermon. I *don't* agree with every point or example, but I *do* have some of the same concerns as the author. I also have a problem with the way the booklet is being touted.

For instance, the back cover of the booklet contains a list of "testimonials" from six well-known preachers. The publisher, not willing to let the material stand or fall on its own merits, feels the necessity of "piling on" endorsements. I know this is a standard marketing technique, but in a book that is refuting the alleged errors of specific brethren, it has the effect of lining up disciples of men.

Which Issues Are Important?

A common technique used when trying to discourage someone who differs has been to declare the issue as unimportant. Denomina-

tionalists do this in the matter of the purpose of baptism. Institutional brethren have mastered the art of belittling the importance of "the issues." That's elitism!

A friend of mine recently contacted one of the "conservative" gospel papers to request that they consider printing a written debate on the widespread practice of offering the Lord's supper twice on Sunday. He was told that not enough people hold the opposing viewpoint to warrant such an exchange. That's elitism too!

How can these brethren possibly expect sectarians to fool around with the small minority of us who believe baptism is for the remission of sins? Why would they complain if papers like the *Firm Foundation* or the *Spiritual Sword* brush off the challenges of "the antis" as not significant enough to warrant debate?

If the publishers of a gospel paper don't want to include articles or debates on certain subjects, they certainly have that right, but they ought to have the courage to admit that they want to avoid the controversy instead of pretending that it's an unimportant issue. And if they admit that, they ought to quit complaining about other journals which choose to limit their writing to positive subject matter.

Those Suspicious Brethren

Some brethren, convinced that the way they do things is best, see "red flags" whenever brethren choose an expedient that is not in the mainstream. This also is a sign of elitism. If a congregation uses a description other than "church of Christ" on signs or other advertising, they suddenly become "suspect." Some time back, while working with a congregation which had an ad in the back of one of the gospel papers, we changed our times of meeting. While we were changing the ad we decided to use the description,

"The Lord's church" in the ad. We also called one of our services "Edification Hour." Before the paper could bring themselves to print our ad as submitted we got a call from one of the paper's staff members questioning it. Why are brethren "suspect" if they choose scriptural alternatives?

Who's Qualified to Read What?

Some have expressed dismay that many preachers are reading too much from the pens of sectarian and liberal writers. It may be a legitimate concern, but it is hollow when they admit that they read everything they get their hands on from some of the same authors. Of course, the difference lies in their ability to read with discernment. Then they can preach sermons and write articles to inform the rest of us. Elitism!

Fellowship Matters

It seems that there's a double standard in the "fellowship" issue. Some brethren who condemn having even limited fellowship with a preacher who believes error on the divorce and remarriage issue, will promote that same preacher's books on other subjects. Why is it perceived as having fellowship with a false teacher to invite that preacher to present a series on Revelation, but it's quite alright to promote his "sound scholarship" in a book on the same subject?

Closing Appeal

Let's not let down our guard as together battle every false way, but at the same time let's do all we can to make sure we do not even give the appearance of elitism.

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

Restoring the One Who is Sick

By JON QUINN

"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore such a one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (Jas. 5:13-16).

There have been various ideas about the meaning of this passage. Some of its words are used in more than one way in the Bible, and their meaning must be determined by the context.

There are some religious groups which engage in "healing services" today, and use oil to anoint the sick to produce a miracle. They appeal to this passage as their reason for doing so.

Of course, an assembly of the whole church is not being discussed here at all. Among our brethren, some agree that this passage deals with miraculous healing of the physically sick, but add that the age of miracles has passed and therefore so has this particular procedure (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Others agree that the passage deals with physical sickness, but not miraculous healing. The idea is that the elders pray for the sick and apply oil for its medicinal effect. Then the Lord responds to prayers of faith by providing for natural recovery. While the Lord is directly involved, He uses natural processes instead of superseding laws of nature to bring about healing.

Then there are those that contend that the passage is not discussing physical sickness at all, but rather *spiritual* sickness! As we read our English translations, one will first think of physical illness. So from where do these folks get this idea of spiritual sickness? You are about to find out, because *I am one of these people*.

The "Suffering" and the "Sick"

"Is anyone suffering? Let him pray...Is anyone among you sick?...the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick..." (Jas. 5:13-15). Looking at how these words are used in other passages will help us narrow down their possible meanings as used here:

1. *Suffering* (κακοπαθει; kakopathei): Suffer hardship; endure affliction. Of the four times this verb is used in the New Testament, it is always used with reference to hardships that come as a result of being a

Christian. Paul told Timothy to "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus," and later in the same chapter said, "for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment..." (2 Tim. 2:3,9 cf. 4:5).

2. *Sick* (ασθενει; asthenei): To be sick, weak, unhealthy; be in need. This word occurs thirty-six times in the New Testament. In the gospels it always refers to physical sicknesses. However, in the epistles, in at least eight of the times it is used it refers not to physical sickness, but rather spiritual sickness: "And without becoming weak in faith..."; "For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh..."; "Now accept one who is weak in the faith...but he who is weak eats vegetables only"; "But take care less this liberty of yours somehow become a stumblingblock to the weak..." (Rom. 4:19; 8:3; 14:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:9; cf. 11-12). So then it must be determined by the context which sickness or weakness is meant—physical or spiritual.

Instructions to the Sick

"...Let them pray...Let them call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..." (Jas. 5:13-14, 16). These instructions are given to those who are suffering, sick (weak) and who also may have sinned in their weakness. As we have already seen, this suffering (affliction) is hardship brought on by our faith. The pressures mount as trials come, persecution rears its ugly head, loss is suffered, and one begins to feel as if he is slipping. He wonders why this is happening to him. Is God concerned at all? He considers giving up. He needs help.

First, he is told to pray. James has already dealt with what kind of prayer should be offered in trial if one is to endure.

Second, he is told to call for the elders of the church. It was not a requirement that elders of the first century have the gift of miraculous healing. Nor was it a requirement that they be skilled in treating the physically sick with good doctoring. But it was a requirement that they have qualities that would allow them to protect, guard and feed their flock; including helping spiritually weak: (a) Qualifications of elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Able to heal? No. Able to teach and exhort? Yes; (b) Responsibilities of elders (Ac. 20:28-31; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4) involve spiritual care and guidance.

This would explain the meaning of "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" to be figurative, as it is in Ps. 23:5 and Heb. 1:9). But what does it symbolize

here? What would be the spiritual medicine used to anoint the spiritually sick? Consult the Great Physician! Jesus used the word of truth to bring about spiritual healing (Lk. 5:31-32). The medicine needed when a brother or sister is weak in faith is to anoint them with the oil of words of encouragement and exhortation. To remind them of the promises of God and his dealings with others in similar situations in the past (like Job and the prophets). These kind of words and prayers of faith are exactly what the doctor ordered!

Third, he is to confess his sins. Again, the assembly and a public confession is not in this passage. Neither is making a confession to a clergyman who will absolve you of your sins. It is done so that prayers can be offered and help can be better rendered.

Results

"...will restore such a one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him...so that you may be healed" (Jas. 5:15-16). This action will have the effect of strengthening one who is weak and tired. It is the Lord's method to raise a stumbling brother or sister up and to renew their vigor. It is accomplished by the power of His gospel (Rom. 1:16). It is to be done in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1-2). We are the strongest as a body when we share concern for the weak. "Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed" (Heb. 12:12-13).

It is not necessary that one sin when he is weak, but the risk of falling when one is weak is greater than when he is strong. What about those times when one who is not only weak, but he also has sinned? The answer: "confess...and pray for one another...and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him...so that you may be healed."

Contextual Agreement

The context plainly shows that it is spiritual trials and suffering, spiritual weakness, sin, and being saved from such that is under consideration here (cf. Jas. 5:7-11). The disciples of James' time were being put to the test. This epistle mentions several forms this pressure was taking. It is times such as these that we need the Lord's help more than ever "Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary." (Isa. 40:31).

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'The Lord's Church in the Upper Midwest'

I am in the process of printing an updated edition of *"The Lord's Church in the Upper Midwest,"* a directory of churches (including a very brief history) for northern Illinois, northwest Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The first edition was published in 1987. Though it will probably be November before they are ready for distribution, I am taking pre-publication orders so that I can get an idea of how many to print. Single copies will cost \$3, including postage and handling. Additional copies in the same mailing will be \$2.50 each. Order from: Diestelkamp Printing, 414 E. Roosevelt St., DeKalb, IL 60115.

A Local Church is Not Like Unto A Business

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Occasionally you will hear some well-meaning brother make the pronouncement that a local congregation should be run like a business. I shudder every time I hear it. The local church is *not* a business, so why should it be run like one.

Ideally, a congregation *should* be more like a family than a business. Wouldn't it be better if we treated older men and women like fathers and mothers, and younger men and women as brothers and sisters? If that concept sounds familiar, it's probably because you've been reading your Bible (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

In defense of the business approach, some argue that the church has "business" to attend to. Yes, it does, and so does a family! However, the fact that the church, or a family, must attend to its business does not suggest that we should adopt business management techniques simply because they have been successful in the corporate world.

I am not saying that it is wrong for churches to "borrow" ideas or methods from the business world, but let's not become like them. Let's resist the temptation to be so business-like that we lose the personal touch. Let me illustrate the danger of doing otherwise:

I heard of a congregation that was looking for a preacher to work with them. One man came and "laid a couple of samples on them" and was well-liked by everyone. Nevertheless, they scheduled another preacher to come "try out" the next weekend. Now, in business, they would want to interview as many candidates for a job as possible, but in the church that's not wise. If they had just gone ahead and asked the man they all liked to move there and work with them, everybody would have been happy (and that's

Gentlemen Soldiers

By ED BRAND

Our generation has seen three great wars. My sons' grandfather fought in World War II. Less than twenty years later, our nation was involved in another conflict on the other side of the world in Korea. A few years later, our men were shipping out to a small, southeastern Asian country named Viet Nam. The carnage of that war was beamed into our

homes by television on the evening news. Our nation still suffers after-shocks from these wars.

War is a terrible thing, for it causes its combatants to kill or be killed. It urges some to become "inhuman" in the drive to annihilate the enemy. It is hard to conceive a gentleman being a warrior.

War invariably produces pacifists. They ardently argue about the immorality of such conflict. They refuse to fight and try to persuade others to join them in their cause.

The church of the Lord in the United States has seen conflict. For over 150 years our brethren have had to fight. Great and worrisome issues have been contested and debated. Each battle has produced casualties. Churches have divided; brethren have become alienated. Bullets and bombs have worked their harm in Europe and Asia. Debates and the print medium have likewise assaulted perceived (and real) foes.

There has arisen a generation of pacifists among us. They evidently think it unmanly to unsheathe the sword of the Spirit and do battle. Like Israel of old, they want to ignore the Philistines, Ammorites and Syrians. Let us stop our warring with them. Ignore them; they will do us no harm. Do not let our gladiators (elders and preachers) spill blood. Our generation has been put to sleep by these lullabies.

But consider what Paul wrote: *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"* (1 Cor. 16:13). These are militaristic admonitions. *"Watch"* equals "spiritual alertness." *"Stand fast"* means to "stand firm, be steadfast" in the faith. Finally, *"Quit you like men"* does not mean to stop, but rather "to play the man." Paul calls upon these Corinthian Christians to be manly in their fight against sin. Like men under attack, they are to be alert and steadfast.

In Scripture (*"I have fought a good fight"*) and in hymn (*"Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war"* and *"Soldiers of Christ, arise"*) we are admonished to *"contend earnestly for the faith"* (Jude 3). We must renew our strength in order that we might engage the enemy. We must engage our great adversary "the devil" with the weapons which God has supplied—the word of God and earnest prayer. Whether our accuser, Satan, be working through the world to assault God's people, or whether he uses "false brethren" to do his work, we must not cease our opposition to his deception.

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

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rare). But if two men are being considered, invariably some will want the first and others will want the second. Now instead of everyone being happy, some are going to be disappointed.

Several years ago a good preacher was being considered by a congregation. It appeared they were about to ask him to move there, until one man said, "I think we should try out some more men." When another man asked "Why?" he said, "Well, we don't have to take the first turkey that trots by." Like in the corporate world in which he was an executive, he wanted a "preacher parade" before deciding which one he would like.

When some in one congregation thought it was time for a change in preachers, they asked that a "Preacher Evaluation Questionnaire" be filled out anonymously by all members. This practice is really popular in the business world today. Superiors, subordinates and peers are asked to evaluate an employee and the information is used to determine whether promotions or other changes should be made. The problem in using that approach in the church is that it can possibly violate a principle set forth by the Lord (Matt. 18:15). We cannot solve our problems hiding behind anonymity.

The whole concept of a preacher being treated as an employee rather than a full-fledged member of the congregation is a symptom of the businesslike approach to church matters. It's no wonder churches feel justified in firing the preacher for just about any cause if, like in business, he's only an employee. Of course, some preachers nurture this attitude by using churches as career stepping stones or by making unreasonable salary demands. If all of us treated the church more like a big family, Christians would be looking for ways to do what is best for one another. That's called love!

The Heart of the Problem

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

While the scriptures personify the tongue as a restless evil full of deadly poison, and compare it to a fire (Jas. 3), it is understood that this is not literally true of the physical tongue. The problem of the tongue is not with itself, but goes much deeper to the heart (the inner man). Jesus says, "...those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man..." (Matt. 15:18-19). Jesus' point is that our actions, and our words, must be conceived in our hearts or thought in our minds before we actually do or say them. It is the inner man that guides the tongue and with it reveals what is truly in the heart.

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Lk. 6:45). Again, Jesus makes it clear that the heart of the problem with the evil that we speak is our heart. That is why it is so important that we are careful with what we allow our minds to dwell on. In computer talk it is called "garbage in, garbage out." If one is filling his mind with good, then good will be manifested in word and deed.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Here is an excellent listing of good things for our hearts to dwell upon. It only makes sense. If we are thinking about good things,

then obviously good things will be the topics of our conversations.

Members of the media will mock the idea that their products have an effect upon the actions of people. They think ridiculous the proposition that the lyrics of a song or the glamorous portrayal of violent acts result in violent behavior. Doubtless, most who see and hear such evil will not reenact it themselves, but to suggest that it has no effect is indeed ignorant.

Movies, documentaries, books and songs have all been responsible for changes in attitudes toward many subjects. Today's "entertainment" has so much vulgarity and profanity because over time we have become callused to it and slowly accepted it as realistic. It is no wonder that we have raised a foul-mouthed and disrespectful generation.

Sexual perversion has moved from innuendo to graphic portrayal in all fields of the entertainment industry. This in turn has resulted in a startling change in society's acceptance of, and participation in, all sorts of perversion.

Unfortunately, the heroes of today's youth are not Jesus, Joseph, Titus, Timothy, or any who are attempting to live godly lives. The heroes of today are musicians, actors and sports figures who may be very talented at what they do, but who lead and advocate lifestyles that are not in harmony with the will of God. As we glamorize and idolize these people, we tend to rationalize their behavior. Having done this, it is a very small step for us to mimic that behavior. Garbage in results in garbage out.

What is influencing your heart and the hearts of your family? Is it God and His word and the heroes of faith we read about therein,

or is it worldliness and materialism? The answer can likely be determined by listening to yourself. If your actions and conversation do not reflect the influence of Christ, then it is the world and its values that are being treasured within. Let's all strive to get to the heart of the problem of sin and set our hearts on the will of God and be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

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