

Leslie Diestelkamp Suffers Stroke

On Monday, Dec. 19th, as this issue was being typeset, Leslie Diestelkamp suffered a massive stroke. Since then he has been unresponsive and his doctors describe the prognosis as "poor."

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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SAFE SUICIDE?

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

I'm not really sure which emotion the newspaper article was trying evoke from me, but my incredulity moved to sadness and then to anger and finally to this article. The headlines read, "*Pair's suicide meant to maximize aid.*" It was subheaded with, "*Didn't want millions spent on care.*"

The Browns were a wealthy couple in their 70's who had been battling many ailments including Alzheimer's, polio and arthritis. On December 5th they parked their Cadillac in their Ft. Lauderdale home's garage and breathed carbon monoxide fumes until they died.

The article went on to describe this well-planned event in ways which seemed to glamorize their suicide. They had sent farewell notes to several friends explaining their motives. Their estate is estimated to be worth over \$10 million. Instead of spending their money on their deteriorating health, they decided to end it all and make sure the money went to charities. The bulk of the money was to go to the United Church Board for World Ministries which is the missionary arm of the United Church of Christ.

Was this a noble deed on their part to avoid being a burden to society and, at the same time, endow some missionary effort with their wealth? Perhaps, by the standards of a society that is beginning to sympathize with the efforts of Mr. Kevorkian, the Browns' act was selfless and honorable. Yet, their taking of their own lives is something that is without precedent among the faithful in God's word.

The debate over doctor-assisted suicides is going to continue to rage in the next decade, but where will we land on this issue? We have seen abortion on demand become a fixture among our "rights" so that women can now procure "safe abortions." We have seen all sorts of sexual immorality legitimized as "safe sex." Can "safe suicide" be

far behind? If we can kill our unborn, what is to stop us from letting our elderly and terminally ill kill themselves or be assisted in doing so by professional killers? Of course, the next step beyond that will be to make that decision for them.

Because many are without any moral compass, they are finding these questions concerning suicide to be quite difficult to answer. For the Christian grounded in God's word, this should not be so hard. From Genesis to Revelation we are presented with godly men and women who went through the trials and sufferings that come with this physical existence. It is notable that not one of them committed suicide!

When reading the book of Job one is struck with the variety and quantity of suffering that was heaped upon this one man. He lost his wealth. He lost his children. He lost his health. He lost the support of his wife and friends. From a purely physical perspective this man had lost everything. If any man

in history deserved the right to kill himself, Job would have to be the one.

Job's wife's suggestion to him was "*to curse God and die,*" (2:9). Job recognized this as foolish advice. He said, "*Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?*" (2:10). Sure, death was very much on Job's mind. He often asked God for the relief that death would bring. He even looked forward to death. Note, however, that Job had within his means of dealing with his circumstance the option of suicide, but he never even contemplates such.

Many, however, are unwilling to accept adversity. James writes, "*Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful,*" (5:11). Would this same mercy have been extended to Job had he chosen to kill himself to escape his physical sufferings?

Consider Paul's statement, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,*" (Phil 1:21). Paul saw an advantage in dying and actually desired "*to depart and be with Christ which is far better,*" (1:23). One could hardly argue, however, that Paul was recommending suicide for either himself or any other Christian.

Job could likewise see the gain in dying and saw no advantage to continuing in his suffering. This all begs a question. If suicide is a legitimate escape from the sufferings of this present life, then why didn't Job do it? He could have served as an example to us of the legitimacy of suicide. Instead, James used Job as an example of perseverance, an example that we would not have if he had killed himself or had had his wife or one of his friends kill him. In fact, Job's example of perseverance would be one we wouldn't even need if, indeed, there were such a thing as "safe suicide."

Was Suicide An Option for Jesus?

Jesus fervently prayed "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39). If, as some suggest, suicide is a noble option, why didn't Jesus use it to avoid the horrors of crucifixion. Obviously, it was *not* possible and still act within the will of the Father. Humanists, aided by the media, are busily waging a propaganda campaign to convince us that suicide is just another choice that we have. Like Jesus, we must have the attitude Jesus expressed in his prayer: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

—Al Diestelkamp

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Straddling Two Sides

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

Evidently humanity has changed very little since the days of Elijah (see 1 Ki. 18:17-21). As a prophet of God he was called a troubler by those who were unconcerned with doing the will of Jehovah. Yet, as Elijah correctly observed, the real troublemakers were those who failed to keep the commandments of God. It's like that today. Those who call upon man to follow God's ways are called troublemakers by those who have no desire to do so.

It is interesting that Elijah appealed to the people to quit hesitating between two sides. Nothing is more repulsive to God than those who will not make a commitment (Rev. 3:16). Notice that the response of the people was much like the response one gets today when he challenges people and their beliefs. Many are satisfied, giving no answer. Most just want to be left alone and not scolded into making a decision.

Fence straddling, as we call it, may work in certain political and social settings, but in spiritual matters it is as ungodly as idolatry. While we 20th century Americans are not likely to have images of Baal to worship, we do have our own forms of idolatry. It is no more acceptable for us to hesitate between serving these modern idols or Jehovah God than it was for the ancients to hesitate between God and Baal.

God vs. Riches

Jesus said that it is impossible for us to serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). One will always take priority over the other. When conflicts arise between two (or more) masters, we will be loyal to one and despise the other. Specifically, our Lord applies this to the conflict between God and riches. We must choose which is master.

Judas Iscariot is a prime example of one who tried to serve both. For thirty pieces of silver he betrayed Jesus to the enemy. For this one selfish act, Judas has gone down in history as a traitor. Yet, Judas did no worse than any other sinner. He sold out for approximately a month's wages, but since then haven't many sold out for much less?

In Acts 5 we read about Ananias and Sapphira. They were a couple who conspired together to appear sacrificial for the cause of Christ, but also wanted to hold onto their wealth. They thought they could get away with their deceit and receive spiritual honor. However, God was not (and is not) mocked. God knows if He is first in our lives. We can play at being spiritual and the world may shower us with accolades, but God

knows! No fence straddling will appease the omniscient God.

Greed has caused many to leave the faith. If material wealth is our goal, we are in spiritual trouble. Jesus said that laying up treasure in heaven is wise (Matt. 6:20). If laying up treasure for this life is top priority, what hope do we have *after* this life? We have to get down off the fence and decide who we are going to serve.

God vs. Pleasure

The religions of men have usually attempted to straddle these two. The pagan religions had people who desired to worship something greater than themselves, but they also had a desire to satisfy self. Therefore they incorporated the two. The concept of temple prostitution was developed whereby they could worship and enjoy all sorts of sexual experiences. These people would devise festivals that were supposedly dedicated to their god, but were little more than excuses to party.

It is amazing how modern "Christianity" has toyed with similar ideas. Many of the so-called Christian holidays were the inventions of the Roman Catholic church as they attempted to "convert" the pagans. Conversion was all the more likely if these pagans could hold onto their festivals. Therefore these became holy days that took the pagan customs and assigned to them "Christian" symbolism.

Today, many people are not content with a spiritual work and diet. The churches have catered to their physical appetites to make things more appealing to them. One is more likely to see a church involved in dinners, parties and festivals than in being a pillar and ground of the truth. Some groups are even

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encouraging their members to engage in all sorts of sexual experiences (pre-marital, adulterous, homosexual, etc.). Others will condone the sacrifice of their offspring (through abortion) to the god of convenience and personal liberty.

Jesus said the cares and pleasures of this life can choke out spiritual growth (Lk. 8:14). Moses is set forth as an example of one who, in faith, chose to forsake the passing pleasures of this life for God (Heb. 11:25). We, too, must come down off the fence and decide just who it is we are trying to please. Is it God or self?

God vs. Popularity

Christians are not those who seek to be popular with God and mankind at the same time. The reason is that being pleasing to God will sometimes cause us to be displeasing in the sight of men (Ac. 4:19-20; 5:29). We must be resolved to obey God rather than men (Gal. 1:10).

What we decide to do must be based on its popularity with God and not with how popular or unpopular it will make us with certain men. We have to come down off the fence and choose. If Jehovah is your God, then follow Him. If popularity and public opinion are your gods, then follow them.

Truth vs. Error

There are so many "gospels" being spread about that no one can seriously pretend to accept them all (Gal. 1:6-7). There is no room for more than one gospel and we must make a choice. Paul warned Timothy that in the future there would be those who would have a form of godliness but be neck deep in worldliness. When it comes to truth there can be no compromise.

The world is full of people who want to pick and choose in the word of God. Men want salvation, but not on God's terms. People want Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord. We want the Bible as a standard only as long as it tells us that what we are already doing is O.K. Don't accept Jesus and dabble in worldliness, and don't accept worldliness and dabble in Jesus. Get down off the fence and take a firm stand on one side or the other. Indeed, God calls upon us to take sides (Matt. 12:30). In the words of Joshua, "Choose you this day who you will serve... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

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I Wasn't Going to Write About Jeffrey Dahmer

By AL DIESTELKAMP

I had decided that I wasn't going to write anything about the baptism of convicted serial-killer Jeffrey Dahmer. What had been written by other brethren (taking a wait and see attitude) seemed, to me, to suffice. But then came the news that Dahmer was murdered in prison, and not only brethren were speculating about his eternal abode—the whole world was talking about it.

One Chicago radio talk show was devoted to the theme: "Is Jeffrey Dahmer in Heaven?" After one caller tried to explain that if Jeffrey Dahmer truly was converted, the Bible assures us that he will spend eternity in heaven, the host of the show said, "I'm sorry, but I hope that's not true." Other callers spouted venomous expressions of hatred toward Dahmer and sentenced him to hell, no matter what the Bible says.

It shouldn't be surprising that most of the world has a hard time comprehending the possibility of such a criminal being saved, for his sins were such as "is not even named among the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 5:1). On the other hand, Bible believers know that it's possible, and that it was for that very reason that Christ died. In the past, long before his conversion, I used him (as well as other notorious criminals) as an example in my sermons about forgiveness. In making the point that God's grace is sufficient to save anyone, I would say, "Even Jeffrey Dahmer could be saved, if only he would repent and obey." Little did I know that a sister in Christ was working on that prospect as I spoke.

Admittedly, this case "tests" our faith in the power of the gospel of Christ. The reason the apostle Paul was not "ashamed of the gospel of Christ," was because "it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). He had first-hand knowledge of that power. The same gospel which changed the life of serial-killer Saul of Tarsus (Ac. 9:21), still has the power to transform the life of any sinner today. When we stop believing that, we might as well shut our Bibles and quit preaching. By inspiration Paul wrote that he (not Jeffrey Dahmer) was "chief" among sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). To deny that the gospel has the power to save one as evil as Dahmer is to deny the inspired word of God.

Unlike Saul of Tarsus, Jeffrey Dahmer didn't live long enough after his baptism for us to make a determination as to the genuineness of his conversion. But that's all right, because only the Lord knows his heart, and only the Lord will be his judge.

FORREST GUMP

By ED BRAND

"Hello. My name is Forrest Gump." With these words I was introduced to a man millions of people have met. Perhaps you have met him. If you are in your 30's, your children may have met him. I had not previously met this likeable sort of simple man. Until last Monday.

He was born in the deep south—Alabama—about the same time I was born in Florida. He was raised in a single-parent home, played football at Alabama for Bear Bryant, served in Viet Nam and came home a hero.

Forrest Gump is a celluloid character—he was created in a book and brought to life in the movie which bears his name. I had been told about how good the movie was. Words used in advertising the movie in the local paper: "A miracle!" "Forrest is everything we admire in an American character." The word-of-mouth recommendation and the reviews combined to make me want to go. However, I was warned "about the language. It's pretty bad." It carried a PG-13 rating, but I've probably heard worse language that what I would hear in the movie. Besides, I didn't need my parent's permission to go.

So I went to be introduced to Forrest. We got past the initial introduction pretty well, which took about five minutes. Forrest was a nice enough person. He was below average in brain power, but he had a lot on the ball. It's the people he associated with—they are the pains.

Within ten minutes his mother committed adultery with the school principal (who

didn't have any—principles), so Forrest could go to regular school.

In college and in the army he associated with people who could not speak normally. Their language was laced with "God" this and "God" that. Of course, Jesus was also a popular item in their speech, plus about every kind of profanity Americans have learned to use. I guess that's what I had to overlook. It was sort of hard to overlook it. There was so much of it.

Then there were the obligatory sex scenes. One involved Forrest and his girlfriend. Another involved his former unit Captain who had his legs amputated, with two half-dressed prostitutes.

Then there was the war, with blood, gore, napalm, death and the inevitable cussin'. You know, the general family-type entertainment of the liberated 90's.

I never did find out what happened to Forrest. My senses were so overwhelmed by what I had seen and heard, I got up and left.

It may be that these are the reflections of an old man who can't adjust to the present standards (?) of entertainment. You are right, I can't. I thought that something which makes the time pass pleasantly was entertainment. "Forrest Gump" was not pleasant, nor was it uplifting. It contained the combinations of speech and action which were offensive and repugnant. Jesus said something about what you put in your mind comes out in action (see Matt. 15:10-20).

It seems ludicrous to go to the garbage can to try to find something sweet to eat. I'm sorry I went. I thought you might want to know.

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Answering A Reader's Question

A reader wrote asking, "Why is there never a mention of which version quoted scriptures come from?" He then commented: "Sometimes the versions seem more like commentaries, rather than translations." He closed with the question: "Is it no longer 'en vogue' to cite the version, i.e. NKJV, KJV, NIV, etc.?"

What is in vogue, or out of vogue is immaterial to me, and plays no part in why I don't mention the version I am quoting. In *Think*, each writer uses whichever translation of the Bible he prefers.

To me, the important matter is that the word of God be quoted accurately. Since there is no inspired (perfect) translation, it matters little which one we use as long as it is translating and not paraphrasing. I don't believe any of our articles have ever quoted a scripture from a paraphrase. It may be that some who use to the King James Version exclusively will find some quotations from the newer translations strange—maybe even sounding like commentary.

The bottom line is that I don't mention the translation unless it is important to the point of the article. The masthead of the paper, "*Think on These Things*," is from the King James Version. When I write, I use the New King James Version.

—Al Diestelkamp

USE AND ABUSE OF THE NAME 'CHRISTIAN'

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The world has been very careless in the use of the word, "Christian." No doubt, most people who use the word have no idea of how to properly use that precious name. Even some brethren have been somewhat careless in their use of the name.

The Bible uses the word, Christian very sparingly. In fact, only two of the inspired

writers (Luke and Peter) even use the word at all in the scriptures, using it a total of three times (Ac. 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).

It seems to me that to attach the word Christian to describe or name some human organization and/or enterprise actually cheapens the name rather than honoring it. Besides, to use it in that way is seldom accurate. Even if a school is owned and operated by faithful brethren, it is no more "Christian" than a grocery store operated by the same people.

On the other hand, some of the arguments I have heard regarding this matter are somewhat questionable. Some point out that the Bible never uses the word Christian as an adjective. However, the same can be said about the word, "gospel," but the same people don't seem to have any qualms about advertising Gospel Meetings. The fact is, it is not inappropriate to use a noun as an adjective—if it fits.

Though, technically, it may not be wrong to use the word Christian as an adjective,

perhaps a better expression would be "Christ-like." Thus you could speak of "Christ-like behavior," or a "Christ-like family," etc. We can't help it if people who don't know any better use the word "Christian" as a part of business names, etc., but we would do well to refrain from calling anything Christian that hasn't been baptized for the remission of sins.

Directories Available

The 1994-1995 edition of "The Lord's Church in the Upper Midwest," is now available. The 56-page spiral-bound book contains directory information (including elders, preachers and/or contacts) of non-institutional congregations in northern Illinois, northwest Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. In addition to the directory, there is a brief history of the church in this area. Single copies are \$3.50, including postage and handling. Additional copies in the same mailing (or copies not involving shipping) are \$2.50 each. Order from: Diestelkamp Printing, 414 E. Roosevelt St., DeKalb, IL 60115; (815) 756-9840.

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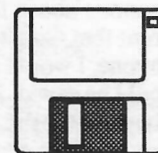
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