

Not-So-Special Issue

I know I indicated this would be a "special issue" to mark the 30th anniversary of the beginning of this publication. Other than the "special" paper and the color we added, this may not be much different from any other issue.

I do want to thank all who read this paper and to give a "special" thanks to all the voluntary partners who have helped to make it possible for us to continue for so long.

—Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

Volume 30

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Number 4

The Way We Were

By AL DIESTELKAMP

I guess it's a sign of aging, but increasingly I find myself reminiscing about "the way things used to be" among brethren. I have to remind myself of the biblical admonition to not ask, "Why were the former days better than these?" (Eccl. 7:10). Indeed, every age has its problems.

In looking back, our goal should not be to brag about how things used to be, but to learn to "not imitate what is evil, but what is good" (3 Jn. 11).

Over the three decades this paper has been published I have witnessed many changes. Some have been unavoidable, some needed and some tragic. There have been gradual changes in attitudes, convictions and priorities among brethren. A few of these are good, but others have not been edifying, and have been detrimental to the cause of Christ.

Unavoidable changes have taken place due to the deaths of many faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Each death is a reminder that "the old must die—and the young may." In the past thirty years I have grieved over the deaths of my mother, my father and my father's second wife, each time consoled by their faithfulness and God's grace. From this I have come to realize that there is no greater blessing one can leave his children than to be "faithful unto death" so that they will not have to "sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Of course, many other Christians have passed from this life during this same time. Voices that once boldly proclaimed the truth have been silenced; hands that performed good deeds have been stilled; and the void their deaths have left *must* be filled.

It would be more pleasant to focus only on the positive changes that have occurred, but that would be misleading and ultimately destructive. Therefore, after mention of what I see as some "positive" changes, I will

note some that I believe have been in the wrong direction.

High on my list of good changes that have taken place among brethren is the elimination of most racial distinctions. Thirty years ago it was not uncommon to see "black churches" and "white churches." It was almost unheard of for a predominantly white congregation to invite a black preacher to hold a gospel meeting, let alone ask him to move there to work with them. Today there are many racially diverse congregations, and the day of the "white church" and "black church" is mostly gone. Good riddance! We are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and there is simply no authority for division based on cultural differences.

Another good change, as I perceive it, is the response faithful brethren show toward truly needy saints. Whenever there is a call for help from brethren who have faced disaster or persecution, there seems to be an abundance of help quickly on the way. This change may be primarily due to improvement in communications and the ease in getting funds around the world, but it is still a good change. My father always said, "My brethren are the greatest!" As opportunity and ability have increased, so has benevolence.

I also have seen a needed change in attitudes toward preachers. The sectarian concept of a clergy/laity distinction, including the need for higher secular education, has been effectively eliminated in most places. I'm not saying it doesn't still exist in some places, but there has been much improvement. Brethren have also been much better in recent years about supporting preachers adequately.

I know there are other good changes that have taken place in the past thirty years, but this is not meant to be exhaustive. Likewise, the following will not be a complete list of what I deem to be detrimental changes, but

they are merely some that caught my attention:

Perhaps the biggest change I see is regarding moral issues. Instead of being outspoken opponents of all forms of immorality, many brethren have become tolerant of what we formerly stood firmly against. As a result, the lines of distinction between the world and "us" have been blurred. Examples: Modesty; choices of entertainment; social drinking; divorce; dancing, etc. If this is not reversed, I fear a future list will include fornication, adultery, homosexuality and abortion.

Another change is diminished cooperation between congregations. The spirit of cooperation that once existed, motivating larger congregations to seek scriptural ways to aid smaller churches is not as evident as it once was. Even communication between nearby congregations has lessened. Some are unwilling to confer with one another in order to avoid planning gospel meetings the same week. I don't know if the reason for this is due to a distorted view of local autonomy, or if it is merely a sign of apathy. Either way, it's a change for the worse.

Willingness to keep in touch with brethren with whom we differ has also declined. This is especially true regarding those who have embraced a more liberal approach to Bible authority. No doubt, to ignore them is the way of least resistance, but is it right? Is it in *their* best interest to remove your "conservative" influence entirely?

Of course, we cannot participate with them in anything we believe to be error, but that does not preclude us from encouraging them in what is right. How can we even hope to have any influence on them if we won't have anything to do with them? They *are* our brethren, and we are in no position to remove their "candlestick."

I suspect some may want to take issue with this last point. If so, you know where I live.

EUPHEMIZING SIN

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Euphemism - the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful, less offensive, etc., than another. (*Webster's New World College Dictionary*)

Is there anything black and white anymore? Is something ever always right and never wrong, or something clearly wrong and never right? As we struggle with this as a society, at the heart of the problem lies terminology. Sin is not sin anymore—it is an oversight, an understandable misstep, an expression of humanity (“I’m only human you know!”). While the world marches on in even more graphic (even pornographic) public portrayal and advocacy of sin, Christians are denied the right to label it as sin.

Ever wonder what the works of the flesh of Galatians 5:19-21 would look like if written by someone schooled only by our modern culture? Do you recognize some of the following?

Adultery - fooling around, sleeping around, fling, affair, serial monogamy, open marriage.

Fornication - sexually active, significant other, fooling around, making love, partners in parenting (surrogacy), different sexual preference, different sexual orientation, alternative lifestyle.

Uncleaness (impurity) - man of the world, experienced, going for the gusto.

Lasciviousness (sensuality) - sexy, freedom of expression, artistic expression, stylish, hot.

Idolatry - everyone must find their own way to God, don't judge other religions, new age.

Witchcraft (sorcery) - new age, experimenting in the occult, channeling, psychic, astrology.

Hatred (enmities) - hard feelings, dislike, bias, discrimination, reverse discrimination.

Variance (strife) - having it my way, disagreement, not seeing eye-to-eye.

Emulations (jealousy) - my needs, spread the wealth, I want a piece of the action.

Wrath (outbursts of anger) - road rage, lose your cool, blowing off steam, expressing frustration over injustices of society.

Strife (disputes) and **Seditions** (dissensions) - personality clash, just don't get along.

Heresies (factions) - open minded, different perspective, religiously open, innovative idea, free thinking.

Envyings - keeping up with the Joneses, economically successful, upwardly mobile.

Murder - pro choice, terminating a pregnancy, selective reduction, mercy killing, right to die.

Drunkennes - high, feeling good, escaping reality, relaxing, unwinding, had a little too much, victim of society, victim of inherited tendencies, a disease.

Revellings (carousing) - partying, dances.

Such like (and things like these) - what is politically correct.

I am not saying that the above euphemisms always have a fleshly connotation, but they are probably used this way more than you think. Tune your ears to them and

you will be surprised how often you hear them on TV, at work, at school, etc. (you should be surprised how often you don't notice them).

Isaiah the prophet warned, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isa. 5:20). Do even we get sucked in by less offensive words so that evil doesn't seem quite so evil anymore? When we hear about these things, do we think, “That's sin”?

When we actually see them in any form do we say, “That's wrong”?

I saw a bumper sticker that said, “If you aren't outraged, you don't know what's going on!” Where is the outrage over sin today? How can we “abhor what is evil” (Rom. 12:9) if we soften and excuse it by the very terms we use to describe it? To be God's people we must talk like God, not like the world.

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Seven Techniques for Breaking Sinful Habits

By MATT HENNECKE

Are there sinful habits you'd like to break? Are you thinking that January 1, 2000 is an appropriate time for such change? Though I don't recommend delay, here are seven Bible-based techniques for breaking sinful habits:

Technique #1: *Pray*

Don't overlook the power of prayer. James tells us that the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas 5:16). The word “effectual” comes from the word “energeo” from which we get the word “energy.” James is telling us to pray actively and with energy. The first and perhaps most potent technique for overcoming sinful habits is to ask God for help.

Technique #2: *Overcome Evil with Good*

Paul says in Romans 12:21 to “overcome evil with good.” “When you feel the urge to give in to an evil habit, do something good instead. Write a letter of hope to a friend, call and encourage a brother, or visit someone who is sick. In other words, replace your sinful habit with a good work.

Technique #3: *Surround Yourself with Good People*

We're told “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). The opposite is also true: “good company corrects bad morals. If you have a sinful habit you're trying to break, then seek out the company of good people. Let their “goodness” rub off on you.

Technique #4: *Confess Your Faults*

James 5:15 says “confess your sins to one another.” Admittedly, confessing your faults and sinful habits will be difficult. You

may be embarrassed by the prospect of others “finding out” about your weakness. But when you confess your failings to others, then they can help look out for you. They can counsel and comfort you as you work to overcome your bad habit.

Technique #5: *Make Habits Impossible*

You may fall back into your sinful habit simply because sin is so accessible! Overcome sinful habits by eliminating or reducing your access to sin. Matthew 18:9 says, “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee...” If you've got a bad habit, make it harder to feed the habit! Look for ways to make sinning inconvenient rather than easy.

Technique #6: *Think Good Thoughts*

The urge to feed a bad habit starts in the mind. Fill your mind with righteous thoughts and you'll reduce the chance that evil thoughts will blossom into sin. Follow Paul's advice: “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Technique #7: *Take One Day at a Time*

It takes only two weeks to develop a habit, but it takes months to break one. Don't despair! Rather than thinking how long it will take and how hard it will be to break the habit, learn to take one day at a time. Don't worry about tomorrow. Work to stop your bad habit today for “each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34).

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The Future of Fatherhood

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

With the advent of cloning and genetic manipulation some rabid feminists have been foaming at the mouth about the possibility of no longer needing men for any reason. Until recently men have supposedly only been needed for procreation, but now we are being declared obsolete.

Some males may wring their testosterone deprived hands over the very thought of being relegated to the likes of the dodo bird, but most of us have more important things to be concerned about than the continual dripping of contentious women (Prov. 27:15). Confidence in the word of God (Gen. 3:16) and godly women (Prov. 31; Tit. 2:3-5) should allow men to merely laugh (Psa. 52:6) at the ignorant clamor of foolish women (Prov. 9:13).

Having said all that, it is important that men see that we are, in large part, responsible for the foolishness of these women. Our failure to be what God has called us to be as husbands, fathers, and leaders has contributed to the delinquency of our sons and daughters. Selfish and carnal attitudes have produced everything from modern Neanderthals to wimps. Laziness is to blame for the chronic spiritual neglect of the family. Cowardice accounts for the lack of strong male leadership in the homes, churches and communities. The products of all of this are unhappy marriages, neglected and untrained children, and a misguided society.

It is not hard to see that the failure of men to be what God has called them to be creates a cycle that is neither easily nor quickly reversed. Thus, fathers, the future of fatherhood is in our hands. God has provided the standard by which we are to love, lead and train. The only question that remains is whether we have the will and the courage to be the godly men that God has called us to be. The answer to that question will in large part determine the direction our posterity will go.

Fatherhood will not be the dominant force for good that God intended if it is not first anchored in the firm foundation of a stable, loving marriage between a man and a woman of common faith. The scriptures are rife with examples of spiritually mixed marriages and where they led. Men and women who want to provide the greatest opportunity for a successful family to the second, third, and fourth generations will seek marital bonds only with those who intimately share their faith.

It is very important that a man treat his wife with the honor that she is due as a joint-heir (1 Pet. 3:7). It is the role of a husband to love, nourish and cherish his wife (Eph. 5:25-33). In performing this role as Christ

did toward the church, a father provides his sons and daughters with an admirable example. When a man treats his wife as merely a slave in bondage to his whims, he provides his sons and daughters with an example of an abuse of power. Sons will grow up to treat women the same way, and daughters will either find men just like daddy and/or stereotype all men to be the oafs that their fathers were.

While the example of a father and mother in a strong, committed marriage is important and prerequisite, successful fatherhood involves more than example. It demands training. Children need to be taught *why* mommy and daddy love one another and *why* they love God. Sons and daughters need to be taught *how* to love God, one another, and their future spouses and children. It is the responsibility of fathers to see to it that their children are trained (Eph. 6:4).

While certainly a father is at liberty and wise to use any and all who can help him raise his children in the Lord, I fear that laziness has many fathers doing more delegating than being actually and intimately involved.

This is no better illustrated than in spiritual training. Our culture has essentially turned the spiritual training of children over to churches. Local churches now bear the burden of trying to impart doctrines, morals and character to the members' children. Feeling that burden, many churches have felt compelled to spend great amounts of money on flashy, cutting-edge teaching props to keep the attention of our easily bored children.

If fathers were more diligent in their efforts to inculcate their children with the word of God when at home, and when travelling about, and at bedtime, and at breakfast (Deut. 6:6-9), then the simple discussion of spiritual topics would be ample stimulation for eager participation in the classroom. However, having said that, it must be conceded that even many of the classes that are offered by churches do not show much diligence,

amounting to little more than coloring books and fill in the blanks. Intelligent training and discussion at home

will result in spiritually intelligent children, and they, along with an enthusiastic teacher, are all that is necessary to having a dynamic class. That is time well spent. The classes offered by a local church should only be considered a positive, reinforcing supplement to the primary training received at home.

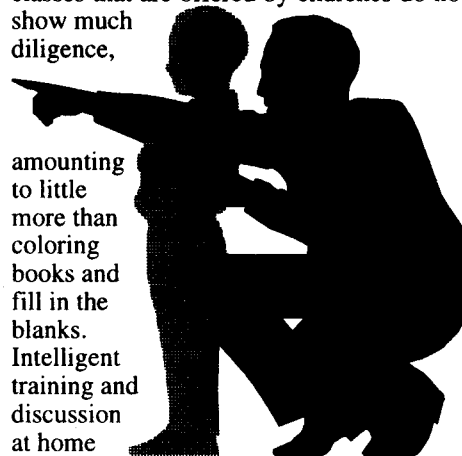
To our shame the home as a haven of protection and a center of learning has been neglected, if not abandoned, for the convenience of turning the training of children over to governments and churches. This laziness becomes the norm and the standard by which our sons and daughters will train our grandchildren, and the cycle continues. Sons are not taught to value a woman by her desire to bear children, love them, and guide the household, but by her outer appearance and financial potential (1 Tim. 2:9-15; 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5). Daughters are not trained to value a man who will provide her and her children with spiritual leadership and direction, but one who can provide them with social status and material wants.

Finally, it is going to take courage to be the fathers that God expects us to be. The world will mock, ridicule and even hate the values and principles that we must teach our children to successfully lead our families in the paths of righteousness. We will be charged with brainwashing and teaching hate.

Even some *brethren* may say we are being over-protective, controlling, and strange. When Christians are losing more of their children to the world than they are keeping for the Lord I'd like to try, for a change, dealing with the problems of being over-protective rather than the problems of not being protective enough. In a world that is out of control, I prefer controlling to the alternative. In a culture where materialism, divorce and neglect are the norm, I'll take strange.

While the feminists and social engineers of our time are looking forward to the day when fatherhood will be but a distant memory of an ancient culture, we need men to step forward and unapologetically be patriarchs with the mind of Christ. Haughtiness and elitism are not needed or helpful, but humility and holiness are. The philosophies of men have produced moral confusion and have destroyed many families and even more souls. Fathers with spiritual vision will see this and diligently seek to sow the peace and stability of God's word into the hearts of their children. Such courageous action will secure the blessings of liberty [in Christ] for ourselves and our posterity as it bears good fruit for generations to come (Jas. 3:13-18).

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Albert A. Wanous, 81, Dies

By KARL DIESTELKAMP

Beloved gospel preacher, Albert A. Wanous, 81, of Pine City, Minnesota, died at home, Nov. 8, 1999, following a prolonged illness. Albert was born March 11, 1918 near Pine City. He married Bernice Stumne who was his faithful companion for 63 years. They had three children, eight grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

In 1976, Leslie Diestelkamp wrote: "One of the bright lights of these years that brings joy to our hearts, and that has abounded to great fruitfulness, was the conversion of Albert and Bernice Wanous in the early fifties. Albert was a successful farmer at Pine City, Minnesota. And he was stubborn! But truth won a great victory. When he obeyed the gospel, he gave his whole heart and life to God... He has won the high respect of all sincere people; he learned his lesson well and he stands as a mighty soldier of King Jesus. His impact on the cause of Christ in the northland may finally be as great as that of any. I count the impact of my influence on Albert Wanous as one of the major accomplishments of my life" (*Here Am I, Send Me*, p.36).

From 1954 to 1965 Albert farmed and preached. In 1965 he and Bernice left the farm to labor fully in gospel work in Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota. A stroke in 1990 took him out of the work he loved but he was able to attend worship, even if it meant lying on a cot, until he became home-bound in 1998.

I rarely spoke of Albert alone, it was always "Albert and Bernice," for they were truly a team of gospel workers. To me they were a modern day "Priscilla and Aquila." There is no telling how many people Albert and Bernice took "unto them and expounded

unto him (them) the way of God more perfectly."

I have never known anyone who personally, worked harder, studied with more people, drove farther, gave more of themselves and their own resources and were always "on the job" than Albert and Bernice—all willingly, joyfully and without any complaint—often with less than adequate support. He worked without fanfare or notoriety and most brethren will not even know his name. It is their loss. We thank God for Albert who always gave Him the glory.

A large crowd of family, friends and brethren from several states—all of whose lives had been influenced by Albert—attended the funeral. Two of the many men Albert helped to teach, Chuck Kozens, Bridgeview, Illinois and Mike Cox, West Bend, Wisconsin, were among the speakers who reminded everyone of Albert's unique teaching skills. He will be missed! Bernice can be reached at: RR3, Box 526F, Pine City, MN 55063-9474. "...Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

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Thanks, so very much for each donation. When we estimated the cost of the last issue, we forgot about the annual fee for the mailing permit. This issue is expected to cost approximately \$550, which would leave a deficit of \$339.41.

FOREIGN READERS: IMPORTANT NOTICE

Our mailing list for readers outside the United States has not been updated for many years. We cannot depend upon being notified when someone moves. For that reason we suspect that many copies of the paper are not being delivered. This is a waste of postage. Therefore, we are requesting that if a red check mark is in the box below, you must write us in order to continue receiving this paper. If there is no red check mark, we have heard from you recently and you need not reply. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but in view of the significant increase in foreign postage, this is necessary. You may notify me by regular mail or e-mail (see addresses below).



THINK ON THESE THINGS

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