

Chief-of-Sinner's Prayer

Denominational preachers are constantly telling people to recite what they call "the sinner's prayer" in order to receive forgiveness. However, the words they suggest are not at all like those uttered by Saul of Tarsus (who, among sinners, was "chief"—1 Tim. 1:15) when he was seeking salvation.

The prayer people need to be saying is the "chief-of-sinner's" prayer: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Ac. 9:6).

—Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

Volume 31

January-February-March, 2000

Number 1

Are Elders Obsolete?

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

The older things get the more likely it is that they'll become obsolete. They get worn out. They get brittle and break. They get "put out to pasture." Certainly we can see application of this in our physical bodies. It is sobering to have the next generation come along and out-perform us.

It is interesting that, despite the foregoing, God's plan for local churches is to have them overseen by elders (Ac. 14:23; 20:17). The word elder comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* which is an adjective describing one's relative age as being older (Lk. 15:25). As in English, the word is also used as a noun describing a position that is typically held by those who are older.

Obviously, some elders are more elderly than others. To be an elder one need not be the eldest. Elder describes the relative age of those holding the office. The scriptural qualifications, likewise, reveal that the position is not to be held by a novice (1 Tim. 3:6), but by one who has amply demonstrated the maturity and abilities necessary to take care of a church. Thus, the position of an elder over a church would require that he be adequately experienced (qualified) and relatively older.

Notice that age is not the only qualification. There are older men who are not elder material. We age automatically. There is nothing inherently noble about mere aging. Cheese ages. It is what men do in that aging process that will qualify or disqualify them to be shepherds of a flock of saints.

Despite the physical frailties that come with age, God has determined that it is from the older that we choose men who have the spiritual maturity and wisdom to oversee and lead. The reason this works is that the physical laws of this universe have no effect on spiritual things. Our bodies may deteriorate, but the inward man is renewed

day-by-day (2 Cor. 4:16). The spiritual man does not wear out.

While the world tends to relegate the role of older men as leaders of a community to a bygone patriarchal era, Christians need to respect the instructions of the eternal God. Time has no effect on God, and, likewise, time does not affect His word. Thus, when we read that the apostles of Jesus saw to it that elders were appointed in the churches, we are obligated as disciples of Jesus to follow that pattern.

Elders are not optional. If there are men that are qualified in a local congregation, then they should be appointed. On what basis would we do otherwise? I fear that brethren are sometimes more concerned with having a "located" preacher, a building, or some other non-essential than they are with having a scriptural eldership.

Paul did not return to the churches of Galatia and Pisidia to make sure that each church had an evangelist, a building, deacons, 3-year curricula or Bible Labs. Paul's purpose was to strengthen the souls of the disciples. He and his companions did this by exhorting the saints to continue in the faith and endure tribulation. It is significant that in his wake Paul left a trail of churches overseen by elders (Ac. 14:21-23).

Many churches have failed to develop and appoint qualified men to serve as elders but have been careful to "pay tithe of mint, anise and cummin," and thus they have neglected the weightier (Matt. 23:23). Nothing is wrong with wanting to organize the work of a local church through the use of curricula, teaching aids, buildings, and preachers, but to do all of these and leave undone the

appointment of elders is to make a serious flip-flop of priorities.

This is not to say that unqualified men should be appointed as elders. It is not to say that a church must put all work on hold while it awaits the appointment of qualified men. I am saying that having qualified men to oversee the flock should be the number one organizational effort of a church. In some cases it may take 20 years to grow elders, but the plan to do just that should be in the works.

To say that having an eldership is just obsolete, "leftover technology" from the first century, is to embrace the haughty, modernistic spirit of the 21st century. In an era of "enlightened" democracy, it may be difficult for some to imagine that having an eldership tend and feed a flock could be better than a business meeting governed by Robert's Rules of Order. Perhaps this is why there is often no sense of urgency to appoint qualified men or any sense of incompleteness when lacking such men.

Also, some may be hesitant to submit to the rule of elders. Submission is not seen as a virtue in our culture. Liberties, rights, and "empowerment" are emphasized, and some, not wanting to give up the power they exercise in the traditional business meeting, may resist the appointment of elders. That is as carnal as some of the problems confronted by Paul in the Corinthian church. "For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3).

God's design for local churches is not obsolete. Some may attempt to modify it and eliminate it, but men of faith will seek to emulate it. Qualified elders are needed in every church. May God increase their number, and may we welcome their pastoral oversight.

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Modern Problems

By AL DIESTELKAMP

One problem that faces newer congregations is finding a place to meet. Rented facilities are hard to find on an every-Sunday basis, let alone three times a week as is customary. Even if you do find one it is likely you will have to set up and take down chairs and other equipment and probably won't be allowed to leave classroom visual aids on the walls. Besides the inconvenience, those we are trying to reach are suspicious of what appears to be a fly-by-night operation.

Most churches eventually choose to buy or build a meetingplace. Even that is difficult for several reasons. Obviously, cost is the biggest obstacle. It is not uncommon today for a church to pay more for a piece of property than what many older churches once paid for their entire building. Adding to the problem are the many governmental codes which must be met—all of which are costly.

The church in Sycamore, Illinois, is in the process of building. We have purchased land and are getting estimates. Every week we learn of some new code requirement. Besides the strict handicap access codes, there are requirements for expensive alarm systems; emergency lighting; water fountains; and just this week they tell us we may be required to have *three* furnaces for a modest 3,200 sq. ft. building with no basement.

I'm sorry if I sound like I'm complaining. Thanks for listening. If you have any suggestions on how to cut costs, or would like to help, I'd like to hear from you. In the meantime, pray for us.

WWJD? or WDJD?

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

There is value in using our spiritual minds in everyday life situations to make choices based on the now popular question: "What Would Jesus Do?" Unfortunately, many people have not first found the answer to the question "What Did Jesus Do?" How can we have any idea what Jesus would do if we don't know what He really did and said?

People arbitrarily attach Christ's name to things He neither did nor authorized by His word. At the judgment some of them will say, "We did many wonders in Your name," but Christ will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matt. 7:21-23).

We develop the mind of Christ through the revelation of Christ in Scripture, not through common perceptions of Him in our culture and false religions (see 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Biblical illiteracy turns "What Would Jesus Do?" into the common, self-serving, "What Do I Feel Like Doing?" or "What Do I Want To Do?"

"What Would Jesus Do?" is a good question that needs to be asked. But just how many of us are willing to do the study necessary to find out?

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Articles From the Days Gone By

In a previous issue of this paper I indicated that I would occasionally include articles written by my father that were published in years past.

This article appeared in *Think*, Volume 1, Number 5, dated September, 1970.

—Al Diestelkamp

Family Circles

By LESLIE DIESTELKAMP

There are really very few family circles left. Many families are rarely together even at mealtimes. "But mother, I can't eat now!" Mary is on the street corner holding hands with her boyfriend (she's 15). John has a ball game. June is on the phone. Jim is watching television. Dad had to work late, and mother can't wait a minute for them because it's her night to bowl. So, one-by-one they pass through the house that they call home and grab a bite. And from early morning until late at night they seldom see each other.

When husbands and wives communicate by writing notes to each other and when parents and children seldom gather around one table or sit quietly in one room, there can be little development of mutual love, discipline action or family togetherness.

Perhaps too many families are too occupied with social involvements to have a real home! I have observed houses where the family has no time to live as a unit because neighbors, friends and brethren are constantly coming and going. Children have learned to be lonesome if no one but the family is home! Husbands and wives feel cheated if they have to spend an evening at home alone.

By now some reader may be saying, "Diestelkamp is anti-social." Well, one more "anti" designation won't disturb me. But it isn't so! I am not against social associations—except when they are too many to allow for family associations. But I am *for* family circles. I don't think any social activity should be allowed to prevent a great deal of family togetherness!

I don't think husbands and wives should *always* have to look at each other over a pot of coffee shared with neighbors—or with brethren. And I don't think children of any age—infants, adolescents or teenagers—should have more familiarity with anyone than they do with each other and with their parents. Indeed, families—husbands, wives and children—need to learn again to *live together*—to work together, play together, eat together, go together, stay together, read together and pray together. Then we will see family circles—homes of joyful togetherness that abound in mutual satisfaction and in glory brought to God (read Eph. 5:28-6:4).

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Though the U.S. military still has a rule against their members engaging in the practice of homosexuality, in recent years they have adopted a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding this deviancy. The net result is that the rule is not enforced, and fellow servicemen who report violations are at risk for asking or telling.

This policy has also become the norm in our society. Landlords, employers, schools and organizations run the risk of litigation if they dare to discriminate against sexual sins.

Unfortunately, it seems that some Christians have conformed to the world in advocating a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding some sins. While I haven't heard of Christians employing this policy in regard to the sin of homosexuality, I have seen a subtle form of it regarding other sexual sins.

When it appears that one within our fellowship is married to someone other than the wife of his youth, we assume that he lost his first wife to death or he put her away because she committed fornication. However, he will not be offended by me asking about it, to assure me that I do not "keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator" (1 Cor. 7:11).

What should we do if we learn that an unmarried Christian is sharing an apartment with a person of the opposite sex? Some would suggest that all we can do is warn of the danger and the possible appearance of evil, but that we cannot insist that they move into separate quarters unless we have evidence that fornication is actually taking place. Since many fornicators have no compulsion against lying I don't know how in the world that evidence would come to light.

There are all kinds of imaginative excuses people give for unwholesome situations while maintaining that no sin is involved: "We're planning to get married and we share an apartment to save money"; "We have separate bedrooms"; "We can control our emotions," etc. If you believe these kinds of arguments there's a salesman out there who would like to talk to you about some ocean-front property in Iowa.

Some contend that, lacking proof or an admission of fornication, we are forced to "put up with" situations which, at best, are unwise and give the appearance of evil. However, the way we appear to men reflects on Christ and His church. If someone we hope to lead to Christ sees a Christian in a situation that is suspicious, it may put a stumbling block in his way.

This "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy wasn't in place in the first century. If it had been, Ananias and Sapphira might have lived a little longer (Ac. 5:1-11). If it had,

Paul should have told whoever "reported that there is sexual immorality" in the Corinth church (1 Cor. 5:1-5) to quit meddling, for surely the guilty ones were not committing their sins in public.

The logical end-result of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" philosophy would demand that no person could put away his wife for fornication (Matt. 19:9) unless she fessed up to it, or was caught in the very act. This would be true even if she was living with another man.

Of course, we always want to give people the benefit of the doubt, but where there is doubt we have the right and obligation to insist that Christians do all they can to remove it. Any true disciple of the Lord will want to be above reproach, and failure to remove the appearance of evil is blatant rebellion and should not be tolerated among saints.



IN SEARCH OF NOAH'S ARK

By BERLIN CHUMBLEY

In the December, 1996, issue of *Popular Mechanics*, in an article entitled "Ancient Mysteries of the Bible," author Mike Filon, examines some of the Bible's most astounding events, in light of modern scientific methods. He suggests that, "Technology and a better understanding of natural processes may explain how these seemingly impossible events occurred."

The article discusses whether or not events such as, the burning bush, Moses parting the Red Sea, Lot's wife turning to salt, the raising of Lazarus, and various other "astounding events," could be explained by scientific methods.

But it was Noah and the ark which drew top billing in his article.

Explorers, archeologists, and theologians, have for centuries attempted to uncover physical evidence that would solve the mystery of the "gopher wood boat."

In recent years, according to the article, researchers have located a site which contains a buried, ship-like object, which supposedly conforms to the dimensions given by God in Genesis 6:15. Other researchers believe they have located "drogue stones," which in ancient times were dragged behind ships to stabilize them, and that images returned by ground-penetrating radar have indicated unusual levels of ironoxide distribu-

tion, which may suggest metal fittings buried below the surface. And the search continues.

What Does All This Mean?

To many, the discovery of Noah's ark, might mean the difference between believing or disbelieving the Genesis record. But to the Christian, whether physical evidence is found or not, doesn't change the fact that through faith, we believe it to be so. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

I believe in Noah's ark the same way I believe in the burning bush, the raising of Lazarus and that Moses parted the Red Sea—through faith! Whether or not physical evidence of these ancient events is ever found, doesn't make or break my faith. God said it, I believe it—case closed!

So, let the explorers, the archeologists and the theologians continue to search for the ark. Personally I believe they are looking for the wrong thing. Think about it. If Noah was concerned with providing adequate housing for his family after the waters had receded, he would have dismantled the ark and built houses from it.

So maybe the explorers need to stop looking for Noah's ark, and begin searching for Noah's house!

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Going Down The Valley One-By-One

By AL DIESTELKAMP

As is true in all generations, the "old soldiers" in the Lord's cause are going down the valley of death. In our last issue we reported the death of Albert A. Wanous, of Pine City, Minnesota. In recent months and weeks we have lost two faithful workers in the kingdom who were of great influence in northern and central Illinois. It is our hope that the brief tributes on this page will serve to encourage others to step in and fill the void left by the deaths of these good men.

ELMER R. GUNCHIN

After several years of battling lung and heart diseases, Elmer Gunchin died September 28, 1999, at age 78. He was a man of strong conviction and blameless character. His good influence among brethren was felt throughout the greater Chicagoland area.

Converted in 1951, Elmer helped to start the Margaret Street church in Joliet, Illinois, where he later served as an elder for a number of years. In 1972, he was instrumental in the start of the church in nearby Lockport where he served as an elder until his death.

During a time when many new congregations were beginning in the area, Elmer would help by occasionally preaching for them. After his retirement from secular work he preached full-time for several years at Lockport.

He was a generous man and one who was well-known for the support of gospel preachers. His interest in the truth caused him to participate with others in the beginning of *Truth Magazine*, and has been a "Voluntary Partner" in the publication of this paper.

He was the husband of one wife, Helen,

who survives him along with their two daughters, five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

E.L. CHUMBLEY

An accidental fall down his basement stairs took the life of E.L. Chumbley Wednesday, February 2, 2000. Better known by his nickname, Tack, he had been a long-time member of the church in Rantoul, Illinois. He was 78 years old.

He and his wife, Shirley, married in 1952 and settled in Ludlow, Illinois where they farmed and raised four sons, all of whom are faithful Christians. Three of the four sons preach on a regular basis (Kenneth, in Nashville, Tennessee; Philip, in Rochelle, Illinois; Berlin, in Athens, Alabama) and the fourth son, Scott, preaches on occasion as a member of the church in Madrid, Iowa.

Tack served for over 30 years as an elder of the church in Rantoul and played a significant part in standing for the truth in the face of liberalism's threat to the church.

He was a decorated World War II veteran, serving in the Army Air Corps in the southwest Pacific. Besides his wife and sons, he is survived by one brother, three sisters and six grandchildren.

Bible Maps

On the market is a new computer program featuring over 150 full-color, printable maps of the Bible lands, genealogies from Adam to Jesus, chronologies of the kings, prophets and judges and a full concordance. The program, produced by Matt Hennecke and Philip Chumbley, can be previewed on their website at www.biblemaps.com

Voluntary Partners

Cost of last issue:

Printing & Supplies	\$ 171.00
Domestic Postage (permit)	361.13
Foreign Postage & Bundles	92.11
Return Postage (33)	<u>10.89</u>
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 635.13
Funds Available for last issue	<u>210.59</u>
Deficit	\$ - 424.54

Donations (as of 2/10):

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TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 901.00
Deficit from last issue	<u>- 424.54</u>
Funds for this issue	\$ 476.46

The last "special" issue, marking the 30th anniversary of this publication, added extra cost due to the premium-quality paper used. I am deeply thankful to God for the many good brothers and sisters listed above, whose generosity has wiped out the deficit from past issues and supplied nearly enough for this issue. I expect this issue to cost approximately \$550, which would leave a deficit of only \$73.54.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

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

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