

Did You Think To Pray for Terrorists?

One of the most difficult tasks our Lord has laid upon us is to love our enemies, and even pray for them (see Matt. 5:43-48). This includes, not only personal enemies, but also those who are enemies of our nation. Of course we cannot pray for them to be successful in their mission to destroy us and our way of life, but we can and should pray that they will one day turn and obey the Lord, Jesus Christ.
~Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Bucking Popular Trends

By AL DIESTELKAMP

A popular trend in sectarian churches is to hide their denominational identity. This is especially true among those who would describe themselves as "evangelical" in doctrine and practice. These churches which are essentially inter-denominational are adopting the "community church" approach and billing themselves as "non-denominational." Since we have long emphasized the undenominational nature of the Lord's church, this presents both some problems as well as some opportunities in the area of evangelism.

A problem this trend poses is that the distinction between them and us has been blurred to the casual observer. When I have indicated that the church I belong to is non-denominational, some have said, "My church is non-denominational too." Of course, this is when there is an opportunity to ask them more about "their church" and hopefully lead into a study of the church Christ built (Matt. 16:18).

In many cases, you will find that these churches which claim to be independent and non-denominational still have denominational affiliation. However, there are many churches that are either breaking ties with their former denominations, or forming new churches that are independent. While these may be truly independent in organization, they are not undenominational. Doctrinally, they differ little with the sects they have left and try to become a melting pot for the "unchurched" and those disenchanted with mainline denominations. Thus they are really inter-denominational.

The community church approach has spawned the megachurches, which are engineered for numeric success by providing what the masses want in religion. These mass-marketing "pastors" set up a convenient religion not unlike what King Jeroboam "devised in his own heart" (1 Ki. 12:33).

Smaller independent churches try to mimic the megachurches by providing every imaginable "perk" to make religion exciting. The net result is that they become mere social clubs with "religious" ambiance. They are what the YMCA used to be!

How can we compete with such enticements? We can't, and we need not. Instead, we must recognize the fact that the simple gospel of Christ is the only means of salvation and we dare not be ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16).

I have come to believe that there is a remnant of people who see through the carnal approach to religion. With that in mind I created a newspaper ad designed to catch the attention of those

who may have tired of the social gospel approach. This ad has drawn more visitors to our assemblies than any other approach we have taken. I am printing the ad below, hoping it will be useful to others in their search for souls who are seeking the truth.

*A church
that is just
a church!*

Maybe you've noticed that a lot of churches today are involved in all kinds of business and social ventures, and very little in teaching the word of God. Some are quite proud of the fact that they place little emphasis on doctrinal matters.

Our emphasis is spiritual—not material or social. For that reason, our main concern is that we abide in, and teach, the doctrine of Jesus Christ. This guide in spiritual matters.

It is our aim to be the very same church as the one we read about in the New Testament. We do not claim perfection in our attempt to follow the doctrine of Christ, but neither do we use our imperfection as an excuse. We are always willing to examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).

The Bible clearly tells us that the Lord's church is "a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5). The New Testament tells us how to conduct ourselves in the church, which was designed to uphold the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

If you are looking for a church that is merely a "front" for a social club or agency, we're not for you. But if you share our interest in searching the scriptures in order to learn what the will of the Lord is, then we'd like to hear from you.

Come visit any of our worship and Bible study gatherings. Or, we would be happy to schedule a home Bible study at a time convenient to you.

**CHURCH
of CHRIST**

2315 Edgebrook Lane, Sycamore, Illinois (815) 895-3320

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Bible classes, 9 AM
Assembled worship, 10 AM
Evening edification, 5 PM

WEDNESDAY:
Bible Classes, 7 PM



A LIVING CHURCH IS A GIVING CHURCH

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Once I saw a sign in front of a denominational meetinghouse that read, "A giving church is a living church." At first thought the words impressed me. Then I realized that giving alone would not constitute a church a living church. But, reversed, the sign would be correct, for a living church is indeed a giving church.

How abundantly does the church live in your community? The answer depends on how that church gives. The vigor of living does not exceed the abundance of giving! Furthermore, the joys of having salvation cannot be in excess of the zeal manifested in sharing the gospel with others.

What We Can Give

The church can give money to needy saints (1 Cor. 16:1); to destitute congregations (Ac. 11:29-30) and to preachers of the gospel (2 Cor. 11:8). But many times the church does not have money in the treasury to give in those ways and for such worthy causes because it has not been challenged

to provide such by the elders, preachers and others who lead its activities. Preachers need to teach the Christians about the worldwide needs.

Elders need to lead the flock into more such activity. Whole congregations need to carefully and deliberately plan (purpose—2 Cor. 9:7) to contribute more to help meet the world's spiritual necessities (1 Tim. 3:15). In too many instances the church is completely satisfied because it is able to pay the fuel and light bills and support the local preacher. But the "field is the world" (Matt. 13:38).

The church can also give other things besides money. Distributively, all the Christians can give time, talent, energy and attention (Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:27; Ac. 9:39).

But it is a pity that some churches seem so unconcerned about anybody except themselves. When there is money in the treasury they often think only of ways of spending it on the meetinghouse, the parking lot, etc. And when there is no money in the treasury they seldom realize it is probably not because they have spent too much, but because

they have not challenged the people to give more. When the church is presented a really worthwhile, justifiable and scriptural opportunity, Christians will almost always enthusiastically respond very generously.

It is gratifying to notice the alertness and zeal that is manifested by some congregations. Such churches usually don't have time to quarrel. Petty differences that divide stagnant churches are cast aside in truly active and living churches. Christians who know the real joy of sharing Christ and His word will hardly allow divisiveness to hinder them.

Remember, the only reason the church has for collecting money is to spend it. Remember also that the amount of money we have in the treasury to spend for the sake of souls will depend upon the quality of our faith, the keenness of our vision, the enthusiasm of our zeal and the completeness of commitment. Indeed, a giving church may yet be dead in sins, but a church that is alive in Christ is surely a giving church in the world.

This article first appeared in THINK, Volume 2, Number 3, dated March, 1971

Loopholes and Slipknots

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

The divorce and remarriage issues among brethren have been with us for many years, but it seems that recently the controversies have increased greatly. From my perspective there are several factors which have contributed to this escalation of turmoil related to this topic:

1. There seems to be no end to the number of loopholes brethren come up with to "justify" remarriage after divorce. This is alarming given the fact that our Lord gave only one reason that authorized a faithful husband or wife to put away a spouse and marry another (Matt. 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12). In fact, fornication is the only authorized "cause" for initiating divorce, and Jesus said that the one who does so for any other reason is the "cause" of any future fornication on the part of the one put away (Matt. 5:32).

2. The great number of people who practice "trial and error" marriage until they end up with one that is to their liking, have undoubtedly influenced some among us. We want to find a way for the ones who now

have a happy marriage to be right with God and remain in a pleasant relationship. The more we are exposed to a sinful practice, the less sinful it seems to us. However, how we come to view it has nothing to do with how God views it. Man's ways and thoughts are not God's ways and thoughts (Isa. 55:8).

3. Sound teaching regarding marriage and divorce has made evangelism more difficult. Who hasn't studied with people in adulterous marriages who, when they were taught what the Bible says on this subject, rejected the Lord's offer of forgiveness? Admittedly, such a situation is heart-wrenching, but we do the prospects no favor by offering immunity from true repentance. That this issue is a deterrent to evangelism may be undeniable, but the same is likely to be said in the near future concerning the Bible teaching on homosexuality as that sinful perversion rapidly becomes increasingly acceptable in society.

4. We really don't like being different. I know we teach and preach that we must not be conformed to the world around us (Rom. 12:1-2), but I fear that we have yet to really

learn to "come out from among them and be separate" (1 Cor. 6:17). This admonition was given in the context of avoiding idolatry. Any willingness to adjust our convictions in order to conveniently blend in with society or the religious world is a form of idolatry. Let's face it! Jesus was different, and the world hated Him for it, and He warned that His followers would also be hated (Jn. 15:18-20).

5. All of us have loved ones who have been affected by unscriptural divorce. This has a tendency to color our thinking on the subject. There is a human inclination to make excuses for those we love, making submission to the plain teaching of the New Testament difficult. This is where the aforementioned "loopholes" find their origin. This also is where our attitudes toward the authority of the scriptures are tested.

We used to describe a wedding ceremony as "tying the knot," indicating something permanently binding. When God binds a man and woman in marriage it is not with a "slipknot," and we must not treat it that way by inventing and "greasing" loopholes.

"I Think God Would Want Me to Be Happy"

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

The man walked away from his marriage and his two children. A year later he found another woman who made him feel "alive." His first marriage had been a struggle from the beginning, and it had only gotten worse. He wasn't happy; neither was she. He had always viewed divorce as wrong, but his situation was unique. When questioned from a biblical perspective about his plans to marry again, he acknowledged that he had no right, but he said, "I think God would want me to be happy."

The girl was just sixteen. She came from a broken home. Her father had divorced her mother ten years previously. Although outgoing and popular at school, she still struggled with insecurities. She craved the attention the boys gave her. She knew fornication was wrong, but her situation was unique. She was lonely and being with "him" made her feel happy and secure. When questioned from a biblical perspective about her immoral intimacy, she acknowledged it wasn't right, but she said, "I think God would want me to be happy." She never imagined that she would get pregnant after just one time. She was scared. A baby would change all of her plans for the future. She became depressed. She went to the clinic and poured out her heart to a counselor. She couldn't consider abortion. God wouldn't like that. The counselor said, "I think God would want you to be happy."

The woman, divorced for sixteen years, had had a hard life. Her "ex" was remarried and happy. Her oldest daughter had left home five years ago; they had not spoken since the abortion. Her son had just graduated from high school. Neither of her children had ever obeyed the gospel. Bitterness and discouragement crept into her heart. The church she was part of was small and aging. She wasn't happy. Her friends from work invited her to their church. She went. She found people her own age in her own circumstances. They bonded. The small and aging church got smaller and aged some more. When the woman was approached about her exchange of the truth of God for a lie, she acknowledged that her new church did some things she was uncomfortable with, but she said, "I think God would want me to be happy."

The, "I think God would want me to be happy" line has been used by many to justify their immorality and apostasy. The rationale is based on a self-centered definition of happiness and the assumption that God wants that kind of happiness for us. This rationalization ignores or is blind to all the unhappiness in its wake. The man divorces

to be happy but leaves behind an unhappy family. The girl fornicates to be happy and increases her unhappiness. She aborts to be happy and deprives her child of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The mother abandons her faith to be happy. All of this is done because people presume that God wants them to be happy.

Can you imagine? Eve observes the potential of the forbidden fruit to make her happy and reasons, "I know that God said, 'you shall not eat,' but I think God would want me to be happy," (Gen. 3:6). We ought to consider that God's boundaries are established *for* our happiness.

Ahab couldn't be happy unless he had a certain vineyard. "I know that God said, 'you shall not kill,' but I think God would want me to be happy." Did Ahab and Jezebel give any consideration to Naboth's happiness (1 Ki. 21:4-7)?

Demas may have reasoned, "I know I should stay and work with Paul, but I think God would want me to be happy," (2 Tim. 4:10). This may hit a little close to home if our personal happiness is determined by how well things happen to be going for us in this present world. Many rationalize and excuse themselves from sacrificial spiritual service because, ultimately, we think God would want us to be happy!

In our affluence we have become obsessed with the importance of being happy. Solomon had been there and done that and concluded that it is vanity (Eccl. 2:1-11). George Bernard Shaw quipped, "The secret of being miserable is to have leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not." Indeed, for many the quest for "happiness" has only brought greater misery.

People are looking for happiness in all the wrong places. Most recall Solomon's conclusion to "Fear God and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man," (Eccl. 12:13), but miss that this conclusion is also the key to true and abiding happiness. "Happy are the people whose God is Jehovah," (Psa. 144:15) and whose hope is in Him (Psa. 146:5). Fearing Jehovah and walking in His ways bring happiness to everything from the food you eat to the family with whom you share it (Psa. 128:1-4). Blessing comes to those who revere, trust, and obey Jehovah God (Prov. 16:20; 28:14; 29:18). It is not the pursuit of happiness that brings happiness but the pursuit of God's will.

The exemplary models of faith are not found pursuing happiness. What kind of example would Job have been if he had just given up to be happier? It is his endurance through extreme unhappiness that makes him noteworthy (Jas. 5:10,11). What if



Mary had decided she would be happier if she aborted her Child? Ultimately, Mary found her happiness in being able to serve the will of God (Lk. 1:38).

If Jesus had decided He would have been happier in heaven we would be lost! We are called to imitate Jesus' selfless attitude (Phil. 2:5-8). When a man divorces his wife for personal happiness, he is not esteeming others better than himself (vs. 3). When a woman aborts her child to achieve happiness, she is looking out for her own interests and not the interests of her baby (vs. 4). These attitudes do not reflect the mind of Christ.

God has not called us to happiness as we define happiness. On the contrary, we have been called to suffer, if need be, for the cause of Christ (1 Pet. 2:19-21). It is better to suffer for doing good than to do evil in a misguided effort to be happy (3:17). There is no value in suffering as an evildoer, yet if any suffers as a Christian there is no shame, but an occasion to rejoice and be glad (4:12-16).

Does God want you to be happy? Indeed he does! Yet, the scriptures that inform you that God desires your eternal happiness also say that He hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), and that we must flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18), and that God hates hands that shed innocent blood (Prov. 6:17), and that we must be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

None of God's word can be ignored or compromised to secure the happiness that God offers. Yes, God wants us to be happy, and that is why we must hate what He hates and love what He loves. Jesus said, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them," (Jn. 13:17). If you do not have the happiness that God offers, then either you don't know the things of God or you aren't doing them.

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RESOLVING OUR DIFFERENCES

By RICK LIGGIN

It may be a bit embarrassing, but it's still undeniable: good brethren sometimes disagree. At times, these disagreements are over matters of judgment—matters of opinion. But sometimes the disagreements are about what the Bible actually says. There are times when one brother reaches an honest conclusion that a certain activity is not authorized, while another brother's study leads him to conclude that the same action is authorized.

These honest differences over what the Bible teaches occur for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, it's because we are at different levels of spiritual maturity: one has more knowledge than the other, or more Bible study experience. Sometimes, it is because we have different abilities: one may have more Bible study skills than the other, or one may have a better ability to grasp certain Biblical concepts. Sometimes, it is because we have different backgrounds: we may have been influenced by different circumstances or different people. Sometimes, it's just that one is more careful—or careless—than the other. But because of these differences in maturity or skills or backgrounds, we, at times, honestly reach differing conclusions about what the Bible actually teaches.

Let me say that these differences are not matters of opinion, but matters of conviction or faith! And when someone expresses (or preaches) his genuine conviction, he is not expressing (or preaching) his opinion! He may be wrong in what he believes, but it is his conviction—it's not just his opinion. And all one can do if he is a man of honest conviction is express that conviction and stand for it. As the apostle Paul once said, "I believed, therefore I spoke" (2 Cor. 4:13).



What do we do when we reach different conclusions about what the Bible teaches? Well, I tell you what we don't do: we don't automatically divide and go our separate ways. As brothers in Christ, we are charged with "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1). Division may ultimately occur; sometimes it is even necessary (1 Cor. 11:19). But division must always be the final option, only after every other effort has been exhausted.

But also: we don't force our convictions on one another; in other words, we don't force a brother to do something that violates his conscience. If one brother genuinely believes that an activity is unauthorized, and another brother believes it is allowed, but not required, then this second brother must give up his "right" in respect for the other brother's conscience (study carefully—Rom. 14:1-23).

What we must do, brethren, is try to see what the Bible says on that topic in the same way—we must try to agree! (1 Cor. 1:10). And that will never happen if we refuse to study the issue together in an open and

honest way. One who seeks to press his view on others while being unwilling to study the issue is carnal—and may be trying to control others. I know this approach is sometimes taken to keep from confusing innocent or less mature Christians, but it is not the Bible way. Careful and prayerful Bible study together in a sincere search for truth is the only way to reach the same mind on any given subject. If we have a vision for the future, we must learn to study together about our differences in an effort to resolve them.

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