

About THINK Online

Little doubt, website publications are the wave of the future, and someday they may completely replace printed editions such as this. However, that time has not yet come. Even though *Think* is on the web, making it available to people all over the world, I want you to know that we are not trying to wean people from the printed edition. That being said, I do encourage readers to check out the website to see the great job Matt Hennecke does maintaining it.

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Worthy of Worship

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve," (Matt. 4:10; Lk. 4:8). Jesus responded to Satan's temptation in this manner, making it clear that only Jehovah is worthy of worship (Jehovah is the name of the God of the Hebrews—See Ex. 3:1-18; Deut. 6:13).

Why Jehovah God alone is deserving of this level of respect and adoration is clearly announced in John's vision of the heavenly throne (Rev. 4). In that spectacular scene the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders gave glory, honor, and thanks to Almighty God (vs. 9) while they cast their crowns before Him "who lives forever and ever" in humble recognition of God's superiority and grace (vs. 10). These worshipers declared that God was worthy of this worship *because* He created all things and all things exist by His will (vs. 11).

Likewise it is clear that created beings are not worthy of the kind of worship that is to be directed toward God. There are some notable examples of this preserved for us. When Peter (by divine order) came to Cornelius, the centurion "fell down at [Peter's] feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man'" (Ac. 10:25,26).

None can forget Herod's failure to restrain the people "who kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man'" (Ac. 12:22). He was punished "because he did not give glory to God" (vs. 23).

Even angels who are higher than men (Heb. 2:7) are not worthy of worship. Twice John fell down to worship the angel which spoke to him. Both times the angel stopped him and bluntly said, "Worship God" (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). Neither the human nor spiri-

tual messenger is worthy of worship—only God.

The exclusivity of worshiping Jehovah as God has prompted some to question whether "Jesus of Nazareth, a man..." (Ac. 2:22) is worthy of the kind of worship reserved for God. In answering this, keep in mind why Jehovah is worthy of worship (Rev. 4:11) and then read the introduction to John's account of Jesus' life (Jn. 1:1-3). The Word was in the beginning with God and was Himself God. Every created thing was made by the Word. The twenty-four elders cast their crowns before Him who sat on the throne because He created all things; it is therefore reasonable and right to worship the Word for the same reason.

The fact that the Word became flesh (vs. 14) in no way changes the fact that He created all things. That the Word emptied Himself, came in the likeness of men, and humbled Himself to the point of dying on the cross does not in any sense diminish His worthiness to be worshiped then or now. Indeed, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:7-10).

Scripture testifies to the worthiness of Jesus to receive the worship of men both while in the flesh and after His exaltation. Consider the response of Jesus' disciples after He came to them walking on the water. He had just saved Peter from the consequences of his little faith. This all took place just after they had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. They had previously heard demons that Jesus had cast out declare Him to be the Son of God (Matt. 8:29). Already the people had surmised that Jesus was the Prophet and tried to anoint Him king—Messiah (Jn. 6:14,15). "Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly

You are the Son of God!'" (Matt. 14:33). They are not just bowing down to Him to be nice or because they want something from Him. They are not merely paying homage to His power. They have connected the dots and have come to the awesome conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God. It is with this awe that they worship Him.

If Jesus was not worthy of the kind of worship reserved for God, then why didn't He rebuke His disciples as Peter did to Cornelius or the angel did to John? If Jesus is inappropriately taking glory that belongs only to God, why is He not struck as Herod was? The only conclusion is that Jesus is worthy of the kind of worship reserved for God because He was (and is) deity. He, too, wears the name of Jehovah. Consider comparisons of:

Heb. 1:10 w/ Psalms 102:1,25

Joel 2:32 w/ Ac. 2:21,22; Rom. 10:9-13

Isa. 40:3 w/ Jn. 1:22-36)

The worthiness of Jesus to receive our worship is confirmed by returning to the throne scene in Revelation 5 and observing that the four creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb (vs. 8) just as they had before "Him who sits on the throne" (4:9,10). If it was worship to Lord God Almighty, it was worship to the Lamb. The Lamb was worthy to receive, among other things, honor and glory (5:12). Indeed the hosts of heaven and earth worshiped the Lamb as they worshiped "Him who sits on the throne" (vss. 13,14). Therefore, let us who hope and wait for the "glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13) give glory and honor to Him who is worthy of our worship.

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"But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'" (Heb.11:6)

Embarrassing Shortfall

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Probably the greatest shortfall of the Lord's church in the 21st century is evident in the lack of elders serving local congregations. While it is clear that churches in the first century existed for a time without elders, it is also clear that they did not do so for extended times as is so common today.

In a relatively short time the biblical record reports, "So when they appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Ac. 14:23). I reject the theory that men were miraculously endowed with all the needed qualifications. While some of them likely received spiritual gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands, there is no evidence that they were given the very qualifications that we find lacking among us today.

It ought to be an embarrassment, to say the least, for those of us who claim to be the very same body we read about in the New Testament, when we read what the apostle Paul reminded Titus: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Tit. 1:5).

To illustrate the problem let me provide some statistics related to the area about which I am most familiar. Since 1954, when as a teenager I obeyed the gospel, I have been familiar with the Lord's work in the upper midwest part of our nation. In 1987 and 1995 I published editions of *The Lord's Church in the Upper Midwest*, a directory and brief history of congregations in the northern half of Illinois, the extreme northwest corner of Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. From these sources and recent inquiries I submit the chart below that tells a sad story:

1987: 87 congregations; 48 elders in 19 congregations (22%)

1994: 85 congregations; 30 elders in 11 congregations (13%)

2004: 80 congregations; 27 elders in 10 congregations (13%)

Of the 70 existing congregations lacking elders, I know of at least 19 of them which once had elders. If my information is correct, there are 51 congregations in the upper midwest which have *never* had the benefit of oversight by elders.

Of course, the larger the congregation, the more likely there will be a plurality of men who meet the qualifications. Some might be inclined to suggest that my statistics, and perspective, is skewed by the fact that I have chosen to work with small congregations in areas where faithful congregations are few and far between. While that might explain part of the problem, I don't think it is the whole answer. I am not so isolated that I am unaware of conditions elsewhere.

I can only give you my opinion as to the reasons for this lack and decline. One reason for our lack in the north is that men who have developed and grown to the point where they meet the qualifications transfer or retire to the south where they must prove themselves all over again, delaying them from serving as elders.

Likely a bigger factor is that elders do not make enough of an effort to perpetuate the office. They fail to train younger men to take over the leadership by the time they become unable to continue on. Certainly, this does not excuse younger men from growing and developing, but encouragement and training from godly elders would greatly help.

Then there are, in my opinion, two disastrous extremes when it comes to the qualifications of elders. One may be motivated by a genuine desire to have elders, which causes them to settle for appointing men who come *closest* to meeting the biblical qualifications. It seems some are willing to appoint any that meet the "family qualifications" and appear to be morally upright. When this is the only criteria the result is often "elders" who can't teach and certainly are not "able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Tit. 1:9).

The other extreme is interpreting the qualifications so strictly that hardly anyone can meet them. Keep in mind that most of the qualifications are subjective—requiring a judgment call—and there are levels of attainment. There is no man who has attained the qualifications to perfection.

Besides these extremes, there is the problem of being satisfied with status quo. Doubtless, there are some that are quite content to do without elders. I'm afraid there are even some who actually *prefer* not having elders. They have gotten along for years without them, and don't see the need to change things. There also may be a few who, lacking the qualifications themselves, don't want to give up the control they have in business meeting situations.

I'm afraid too many judge the strength of a congregation by whether they are large or rich enough to be "self supporting" and able to support a local preacher. I wonder if some had to make a choice between having a preacher work with them or have qualified elders, if they would choose to have the preacher. Of course, one does not preclude the other, but there seems to be more emphasis placed on having a preacher than in developing elders.

Every congregation can, depending on their situation, be described in one of following ways:

Scripturally organized—Having appointed a plurality of qualified men to serve as elders.

Unscripturally organized—Having appointed men as elders who do not meet the qualifications set forth in God's word.

Scripturally unorganized—Having no elders due to a lack of men meeting the biblical qualifications.

Unscripturally unorganized—Having a plurality of men meeting the qualifications, but failing to appoint them.

We need older men who meet the qualifications to desire this good work (1 Tim. 3:1). Don't use lack of desire as an excuse. Instead, develop a desire because you know that it's a good work, and "to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17).

We also need middle-aged men who have proven themselves in leading faithful wives and children, to develop enough communication skills in order to be able to teach effectively. They must build their Bible knowledge to a point where false doctrine can be identified and answered.

There is also a need for young men to plan for future leadership by making wise choices in all areas of life. They need to guard their reputations even in their youthful years (1 Tim. 4:12). Very early in life, before they are married, they need to think about spiritual matters even in choosing their friends, and limit their romantic pursuits to girls and women who are godly. Above all, they must keep themselves "pure" (1 Tim. 5:22). They need to start early developing their teaching and serving abilities, and when qualified serve as deacons. They should be encouraged to take an active part in the worship and work of the church.

No church should consider itself to be a spiritually mature church as long as they have not "set in order the things which are lacking, and appoint elders..." (Tit. 1:5). In the meantime, other men must lead the church into scriptural work and worship and work toward attaining the qualifications.

In Defense of



By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Popular vernacular calls ideas which break with the norm, "thinking outside the box." Some aspects of considering the abnormal or new can be challenging, even refreshing. It can be an exercise which tests flexibility and open-mindedness.

The Bible is a book for thinkers: "Consider the lilies" (Matt. 6:28); "Meditate on these things" (1 Tim. 4:15); "Think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). We cannot think our way to heaven, but we *can and must* understand God's communication as to how to receive His grace (Eph. 3:4). Whether we need to think "outside the box" to be saved depends on what the box is.

If the box is the religion and teaching of men, then we are going to have to break free of it in our thinking and actions. It is usually difficult and painful to see when something we believe or a religion we are part of is not dependent wholly on God's Word. Our thinking stays inside the box of false reli-

gion when we argue based on things like sincerity, good works accomplished, and the number of those who are involved. Jesus, Himself, said there will be many like these to whom He will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matt. 7:22-23). Thinking outside the philosophies and theologies of man is healthy and necessary in order to think inside the right box.

The modern concept of "thinking outside the box" is probably asking us to do more than simply be open-minded or shake off error. I suspect we are being taught not to ever box our thinking. Put another way, it is being advocated that truth is not absolute and therefore we should not be bound by any concept or standard.

This is precisely why some have become so "open-minded" that it seems that their brains have fallen out. They accept no standards, no one is wrong, everyone is right, there are no restrictions, etc. It doesn't matter if you point out that they accept contradicting positions; they are simply view-

ing things in their own way.

Like it or not, God's revealed truth is a box. It contains specific understandable information and it is our job to comprehend the original meaning as intended by God. This information is our standard (2 Tim. 3:16-17)—a "box," within which we must live to be pleasing to our God.

Thinking outside this box usurps God's position. There is nothing outside of God's box but speculation, uncertainty, presumption, and error.

Lust for something new, or more, has turned the hearts of many away from God's ancient word. The challenge is to channel this desire into a search of the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33) as revealed in His word. We haven't mastered "thinking inside the box" when it comes to God's word. Why would we think we have any business outside His box?

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HELPING OTHERS TO CHANGE

By RICK LIGGIN

It's hard to change! It doesn't matter who you are, young or old—for all of us, change is hard! It's hard because it hurts, or at least, it's uncomfortable. It puts us way out of our comfort zone, and stretches us almost to our limits. The truth is, change just doesn't feel natural; and because it doesn't feel natural, it doesn't come easy. Oh, sure, we can make a few adjustments here and there, but real, substantive change—I mean really changing something that's deeply rooted in us in a lasting way—man, that's tough. And most of us probably know it.

Now, the fact is that some things don't need to change—because they work! And so, as the old adage goes: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Some things don't need to change—because they're right! It's dangerous, indeed, to try to change God's word or alter His plan; His way is always "right" and never in need of modification or change. But folks, some things *do* need to change! Bad habits need to change. Character flaws need to change. Faults need to be corrected. In fact, anything about me or about what I'm doing that is inconsistent with God's word, not only needs to change, it must change if I

hope to please the Lord. And as difficult as it may be to accomplish, and as bad as it may hurt to do it, we need to make those changes to keep our lives in harmony with God's will.

Now, with that said, let me focus on the real point of this article. I want to focus, not on the ones who need to change, but on those who are waiting for others to make the kind of changes that they need to make. That can be hard too, especially when the one who needs to change is a close family member (maybe a husband or a wife) or a brother or sister in Christ. What do we do when one we love needs to change, but that change is coming at a painstakingly slow pace?

Well, it may not be the right thing, but here's what we normally do: we get frustrated with the situation and become impatient with the person; and often we try to force a change more quickly than it possibly can come, either by nagging or by repeated confrontation. We try to drive the person to reformation or change...and "the sooner he gets it done, the better." We forget how hard it is, even for ourselves, to make real and lasting changes in our character. But all this ends up doing is overwhelming the individual with painful guilt, so that he becomes

discouraged and depressed; or it makes him mad and drives him away. He probably knows he needs to change. He's just struggling to get it done and to keep it changed—the same way you or I would struggle if we were trying to affect a real change in our lives.

Instead of frustration and efforts to force the person to change, what we need to do—regardless of his spiritual situation—is we need to be more patient! This is exactly what the apostle Paul teaches us to do when he said: "We urge you...admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, *be patient with everyone*" (1 Thess. 5:14). He essentially said the same thing to Timothy when he urged: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, *with great patience and instruction*" (2 Tim. 4:2). No, we don't ignore the person's sin. We patiently work to help him to affect a change. We keep on encouraging him "with great patience and instruction." Isn't that what you would want if you were trying hard to make a change? I think so! Vision for this person's future...and our own...requires us to be more patient.

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Death of An Illustration

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

Years ago a cartoon appeared in a bulletin. A line drawing of just a woman's slip said something like, "Oh, there's the doorbell! I can't get it, I'm in my underwear!" Next to it was a drawing of a bikini and it responded, "I'm dressed, I'll get it!" The irony made a good point about society's lack of a consistent modesty standard at the time.

I believe the point of this cartoon is probably lost just these few years later. The reason most wouldn't get it is that few are embarrassed to show their underwear in public today. Pants are worn so low and tops so high that little is left to the imagination. What little is left to the imagination is shown by thin and tight clothing.

However, it has gotten even worse. Television, advertisements, and movies have normalized walking around in public in underwear, or less. Few would be shocked by seeing someone's underwear today. In fact, it might be hard to tell if someone was

wearing underwear as outerwear since some clothing is designed to look like underwear.

How did the above illustration die? I'll repeat what others have said: The war against immodesty is being lost because it isn't being fought. I'm not sure any clothing exists that would make someone of the world blush today. I wonder about some Christians (Jer. 8:12). For years there have been arguments over what constitutes modest clothing. Well, now there doesn't seem to be any such thing as immodest clothing. And many Christians are changing with the world, just a step or so behind.

We are to dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9). What we wear will demonstrate if we really profess godliness (1 Tim. 2:10). This is the goal, not comfort, style, popularity, or the ability to play sports.

"Where is the line?" is often the rallying cry of those who want the style of the world to set the standard for all of us. Those who are godly will search for a line in God's word. Rejecting, as unproved, the standard

of modest clothing others hold to does not excuse you from proving that your clothing is proper in the eyes of God. Can you demonstrate from Scripture that you are dressing modestly? When the doorbell rings can you say, "I know I'm dressed decently, in acceptable clothing—I'll get it!"?

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Once again we want to express our thanks to our voluntary partners in this effort. The last issue cost significantly more than I anticipated because I forgot that it was time to pay the annual renewal fees for the web page. Barring any other unforeseen expenses, this issue is expected to cost about \$560 which will create a deficit of \$167.60.

Holy and Awesome Is God's Name

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

The sinful use of God's name in vain has long been a problem. A prohibition of this was third in the list of Ten Commandments under the law of Moses (Ex. 20:7). To violate this was a form of blasphemy. In the New Testament we are commanded to "put off" among other things, "blasphemy" (Col. 3:8). Even without these warnings people who recognize the name of God to be "Holy and awesome" (Psa. 111:9) will not use His name loosely, or as a byword.

One of the most common phrases heard today is "O my God!" This is not heard from people who are genuinely calling on Him in prayer or praise, but as an expression of surprise or unbelief. Almost every television show uses that phrase often.

I'm pleased to say that I haven't noticed this common phrase being used in that way by Christians. Let's keep it that way. Of course, there is a right way to use those same words. It is used many times in the Bible, mostly in the Psalms, such as David's praise: "O my God, I trust in You..." (Psa. 25:2).

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