He Enjoyed Listening to Him

By RICK LIGGIN

Recently, while reading again in the book of "Mark," I was intrigued by the relationship between Herod Antipas and John the baptist (6:14-29). You will recall that Herod had put John "in prison on account of Herodias,"—his present wife (6:17). Herodias had been the wife of Philip, Herod's brother. But Herod, a notorious womanizer, had seduced Herodias away from her husband (his own brother) and married her (6:17). What got John in trouble was when he told Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (6:18). Naturally, Herod did not like this, but he wasn't the one most upset by it. Herodias was the most enraged, so much so that she held a grudge against John and wanted him executed. She could not do this, however, because "Herod was afraid of John, knowing...he was a righteous and holy man"—and so, "he kept him safe" (6:20).

All of this is fascinating enough, but what especially intrigues me is the fact that, despite John's message, Herod "used to enjoy listening to him" (6:20). Now that's amazing! You almost have to believe that much of what John preached on, especially while in Herod's prison, must have been aimed right at Herod—at urging him to correct his evil ways. And yet, Herod enjoyed listening to John! Why? Why would he enjoy listening to preaching that basically condemned him?

I wonder the same thing about some of the folks who listen to sound gospel preaching today. Why do some seem to enjoy hearing the gospel preached—a message that condemns their wicked ways—when they have no intention of obeying it?

Well, I can't say for sure about Herod (or anyone else, for that matter), but I am made to wonder if somehow some have gotten the impression that there's some kind of "merit" just in listening to good preaching. Some seem to think that, even though they don't obey the word, their hearing it will be put down to their credit, and this will be enough to get them into God's good graces.

Let me assure you that there is more to getting into God's good graces than hearing His word! Like Herod, you may really enjoy listening to sound gospel preaching, but listening is not enough! We must be "doers of the word" (Jas. 1:22-25).

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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The Constant Battle With Impatience

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Since patience is a virtue (2 Pet. 1:6), it should be no great surprise that Satan would often challenge us with the temptation to be impatient.

Most people have had a lot of practice being impatient. We have grown accustomed to having what we want, when we want it. When that doesn't happen, we frequently become impatient, which inevitably leads to other problems.

A child may throw a tantrum if he has to wait his turn, or if his parents won't buy what he wants—right now! This immature attitude may simply be validation of the old saying, "The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree." Many young parents have insisted on having—from the get-go—every advantage their parents had worked many years to obtain. Instead of patiently putting up with a used vehicle until they could afford to buy a brand new car, they go ahead and buy one anyway. Often a second family income is necessary to pay for a luxury, and that demands a second car which might not otherwise be necessary.

The problem with impatience is that it is a chronic condition. Getting what you want becomes a habit that is hard to break. Before "wants" are paid for, we convince ourselves that we " need" other things, and we need them now!

Impatience in material matters is bad enough, but it's especially destructive when it rears its ugly head in even more important areas of life. If patience has not been developed early in life, young people will likely become impatient in fulfilling their sexual urges, and will convince themselves that they "deserve" the pleasures reserved for marriage—especially if they are "in love."

Christians must fight against impatience in dealing with one another. We are commanded to "be patient with all" (1 Thess. 5:14), including the unruly, fainthearted and weak. In all our teaching we must show patience (2 Tim. 2:24).

We may even become somewhat impatient with our own pursuit of righteousness. For that reason we are warned not to "grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9).

God promises great things to "those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality" (Rom. 2:7). Even when our righteousness brings trouble to us in the short-term, we are reminded to be "patient in tribulation" (Rom. 12:12), for as we are reminded in another place, "be patient until the coming of the Lord...Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Jas. 5:7-8).

Leaving the Word of God

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

In the early days of the church in Jerusalem there arose an issue concerning money that had been laid at the apostles' feet for distribution to believers who had need (Ac. 5:32-35; 6:1). Apparently, the widows of Greek speaking Jews were being neglected in the disbursement of funds. The complaint against the Hebrew speaking Jews appears to be a charge of unfair discrimination.

From civil governments to families to churches, the distribution of money frequently brings with it some controversy that involves selfishness, greed, and charges of unfairness. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10).

It is interesting to note how the twelve apostles responded to the controversy over money. They declared, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (6:2). Yet, "serving tables" is exactly what many present-day professing disciples want the leaders of their churches to do, and do well.

Do not misunderstand what the apostles were saying. They were not saying that disciples should not be concerned about taking care of one another's physical needs. Clearly, this mutual caring and sharing was an expression of love and an extension of their spiritual fellowship (Ac. 2:44-46; 4:32). It was a legitimate and expected function of the collectivity of disciples, made evident by the apostles' request for the church to select men of good reputation that could be appointed to see that the work was accomplished in an honorable fashion (6:3).

However, the apostles gave priority to their work as apostles over caring for the physical needs that had arisen. Doing an adequate job of the daunting task of distributing funds to the widows in an equitable way would require the apostles to neglect the work Christ had given to them. It was not desirable, therefore, that the apostles become occupied in tending to physical needs to the neglect of tending to spiritual needs. This is not because "serving tables" was unimportant or beneath them but because the more important work for which they were uniquely qualified would suffer if they were burdened with "serving tables" as "tables" ought to be served.

Application of this principle needs to be made to modern churches and the things that are emphasized in their work and those assigned to serve in divinely-ordained roles. Most churches major in "serving tables" and, in doing so, end up leaving the word of God. Indeed, much of what churches justify as "serving tables" is, in actuality, an excuse to serve bellies (1 Cor. 11:21,22; Rom. 16:18). Not even the noble work of serving widows was to burden the church if there were family members who could care for them (1 Tim. 5:16). There is no justification for burdening churches with less noble endeavors under the guise of service.

Yet, even amongst churches that have not followed the social gospel trend, there seems to be an inclination to focus our energies on physical things to the neglect of spiritual things. This often manifests itself in the added responsibilities we impose on those in God given roles of leadership and influence.

Elders have the responsibility to shepherd the flock and tend to its spiritual needs (Ac. 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), yet they often find themselves burdened primarily with physical things, the distribution of money, the formulation of budgets, building issues, parking lots, and advertising. It is not desirable that they should leave their primary role of overseeing the spiritual health of the flock to engage in work that deacons (or just about anybody else) could do. As a result, we often have physically attractive and well-kept buildings full of malnourished, sick, and dying souls.

Preachers have the responsibility to preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2) and give attention to reading, exhortation, and doctrine. They are to meditate on these things and give themselves entirely to them (1 Tim. 4:12,15). Yet, often times the preacher is expected to publish the bulletin, visit the sick, deal with the beggars, answer the mail, fix the toilet, post announcements, handle complaints, moderate disputes, assign the teachers, and order the class material.

Do not misunderstand. All of these things require the attention of somebody and pastors and evangelists are not above such menial tasks. Indeed, it is good if they share in the performance of these duties and lead by example. However, it is not desirable that their primary work be compromised or sacrificed to "serve tables."

It has become cliché to say that ten percent of the people in any organization do ninety percent of the work, this is neither desirable nor profitable. Progress will not be realized until churches and their elders figure out that their scripturally-defined roles and work have less to do with money and "serving tables" and more to do with the word and prayer.

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Secularizing What God Has Done

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Many things which God has done can be studied from a non-religious perspective. God's law can be compared to other legal systems. God's creation can be examined and tested as purely natural elements and processes. However, in an attempt to make some things of God more palatable to our humanistic society, some are yielding to the temptation to secularize what God has done.

The controversy over displaying the ten commandments on public property has caused some to present the commandments as a symbol of the foundation on which our nation was built, a historical symbol of law, and a historical rather than religious display. Although the ten commandments have undoubtedly had historical and secular effects, it is an injustice to divorce them from religion, and especially to separate them from their source—God! This is a threat to all scripture.

The debate over the teaching of evolution and creation in the schools is taking a similar secular turn in an attempt to be less offensive to the humanists. The argument from intelligent design dates back at least to Romans 1:20, but some "Fundamentalists" are now pushing an "intelligent design" curriculum in public schools where the name and nature of the Designer are unspecified. Although this approach is not offensive to those who believe life came to earth from aliens, the mainstream scientific community sees it as a stealthy attempt to teach creationism in the schools.

What are the ten commandments without Old Testament scripture and God? What is "intelligent design" without God our Designer and Creator? His words are historical foundations, but much more. His works leave marks of intelligent design, but much more. We have enough trouble getting people to fully accept the God of revelation without saying His works weren't done by Him and His words weren't inspired by Him. While the motive of acceptability among the ungodly is understandable, truth is never served by error, or even partial truth.

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What Is A False Teacher?

By MATT HENNECKE

There has been a great deal of discussion recently regarding "false teachers." In one sense, anyone who teaches something false could be called a "false teacher," i.e. a teacher of that which is false. However, I'm not sure the Bible use of the term "false teacher" is so broad. The biblical use as noted below seems more restricted.

First note 2 Peter 2:1 which says, "...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...." The passage characterizes "false teachers" as acting "secretly" (NKJV) which according to Strongs means "to lead in aside, i.e. introduce surreptitiously." (I had to look up "surreptitiously" too—it means to "snatch secretly, stealthy, acting or doing something clandestinely.") In other words, "motive" seems integral to the labeling of "false teacher." For instance I think it would be outside the biblical use of the phrase to label Apollos a "false teacher." His teaching the baptism of John was not the full story and he had to be corrected (Ac. 18:24-26), but his motive seems to have been good. Was he wrong? Yes. Was his teaching false (inaccurate)? Yes. Did he need to be taught and his teaching refuted? Yes. Was he a "false teacher" in the biblical use of the phrase? I think not.

One other passage that may shed some light is 2 Corinthians 11:4. While the verse does not specifically use the term "false teacher," the description fits. The men described came "preaching another Jesus." They are called "false apostles (vs 13). Now what is interesting, is that they are not called "false apostles" *only* because they "preach another Jesus," but because of their motives (Note verses 13-15). It seems to me that Paul calls these men "false apostles" (*Strongs:* "pretend preachers"), because they are "deceitful workers." The Greek word for "deceitful" means "guileful." Hence, they are motivated by deceit and guile—their intent is to undo or harm their hearers. To be a "false teacher" as used by scripture, then, seems to require two things:

1) to teach that which is untrue, and
2) to do so with intent to deceive

From a practical standpoint, I try to shy away from calling someone a "false teacher" when I don't know their motives. Otherwise, I might be inclined to call everyone a false teacher who disagrees with me! Instead, I try expose the error of their teaching, try to expound to them the way of the Lord more perfectly, and try to remain humble lest I fall in my haste to expose their error. If, at some point the motives of one who teaches that which is "false" become obvious, then they qualify for the label "false teacher;" but until then I feel inclined to avoid a label that only polarizes.

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Encouraging News

By AL DIESTELKAMP

In our last issue I wrote an article entitled, "Embarrassing Shortfall," noting that too few churches have been able or willing to appoint qualified men to serve as elders.

While I was in the process of writing that article, the church in Bradley, Illinois, completed the task of appointing Jon Quinn and Mark Regel as overseers. In fact, I had to change my statistics due to this news.

The ink was hardly dry on that issue when Jeff Smelser reported that the church in Centerville, Virginia, had appointed Mark Adams and Rick Tolbert as elders.

In February, the church in Normal, Illinois, ordained Keith Barclay, Howard Colvin and Ray Ferris to feed the flock of God among them.

No doubt, there are other congregations which have become scripturally organized in recent months, and hopefully others which are working toward that goal. Since I had lamented the lack of elderships, I thought it important to rejoice with brethren who have made progress.

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