

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

GRUMBLING

By Matt Bassford

We don't often think of it this way, but one of the most significant moments in the Pentateuch occurs in Exodus 16:2. By this point in time, the Israelites have seen one of the most impressive displays of God's power in the entire Bible. He has rescued them from Egypt, brought them safely through the Red Sea, and destroyed Pharaoh's army when he attempted to follow them. Now, God is leading them to the bountiful land He promised to their fathers.

Nonetheless, they complain. Even though they have watched God destroy countless thousands on their behalf, they express regret that God did not destroy them too because their situation is so, so bad. We have seen similar behavior from them before, but this time, they prove themselves unchanged by an experience that Paul compares to baptism in 1 Corinthians 10:2.

In fact, they won't ever change. On its own, this incident seems insignificant. God even reacts to their complaining by giving them the food they ask for. It sounds like everything is fine, right?

Everything is not fine. Through their complaining, the Israelites have started down the slippery slope to disaster. The same spirit that leads them to grumble also will lead them to rebel when God tells them to go up and claim the land. They will grumble about God's choice of Moses to be their leader, His decree that priests must come from the tribe of Levi, and, in the height of irony, the delicious manna that He gave them in response to their grumbling about lack of food!

In time, this exhausts even the patience of God. He decrees that none of the complainers will enter the land. Every time they grumble thereafter, He kills off another few thousand. By the end, of the more than 600,000 men who began the journey, only two survive to complete it. In the Bible, the people of God are frequently a wretched lot, but rarely do they behave so shamefully as this.

It's easy for us to sneer at their bad behavior. However, it should call us to examine ourselves instead. In the style of Romans 2, we must ask whether, as we condemn the grumbling and complaining of others, we ourselves grumble and complain.

Do we, for instance, complain about the elders whom God has given charge over us? How about the preachers who faithfully present the word to us? What about the spouses that God has given us? What about the jobs that we can use to provide for ourselves and our families?

This is far from a complete list. Satan tries to get us to complain about a nearly infinite list of things. Many of these things are gifts from God, but somehow, we don't think they're good enough for us.

Because complaining is so common, we often treat it as a minor spiritual problem. However, the example of the Israelites shows that it is anything but. I'm not the judge of anybody, but I suspect that when Christ returns, more than one Christian will learn to their dismay that their practice of the sin of grumbling has led them to lose their souls. We cannot be faithful Christians and habitual complainers at the same time.

Instead, let us be people who are thankful, humble, and patient. If we suffer from the failings of others, how much more do we ourselves fail! If earthly life is imperfect, how much more should we look to the joys of the life to come with eager anticipation! As with the Israelites, God has given us all we need. In all things, let us seek and glorify Him. ■

Evil Surmising

By Joe R. Price

Evil surmising is thinking the worst of somebody. That is a pretty good way to define evil surmising in everyday language. Surmise is defined by the lexicons “to suppose, conjecture, suspect” (Vine, 1:284; Thayer, 644; Moulton, 418). The Greek-English Interlinear by George R. Berry translates the word *huponoia* in 1 Timothy 6:4 as “wicked suspicions” (the NKJV translates it as “evil suspicions”). It conjures up, by way of conjecture, evil and injurious suspicions against another person. According to 1 Timothy 6:4, evil surmising is the product of pride and obsession over disputes and arguments. Its companions are envy, strife, reviling, and wrangling (1 Tim 6:4-5). Without question, evil surmising is a divisive, destructive sin.

Sometimes we are tempted to think badly of others. We should not, but we judge a person’s motives, charge him with evil purposes, and impugn his character based on nothing more than conjecture and suspicion. Such sin is “evil surmising.” It is assuming an evil motive, attitude, and/or character upon a person without adequate evidence or accurate information. “Why did she say that?” and “Why did he do that?” fill our head, and before we know it, we answer ourselves by unjustly assigning an evil intention to the person. We must abstain from this evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

Jesus said, **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”** (John 7:24). We must be careful not to make a judgment about a person, thing, or event unless and until we have the proper information from which to make a “righteous judgment.”

The next time you wonder why someone said or did something, instead of letting evil suspicion form your decision about that person, do what Jesus commands and judge righteously.

If it involves a personal issue between you and another, go directly to that person to verify the facts and resolve every sin and disagreement in a godly way. Reconcile and, if necessary, exhort and warn the person of his sin (Matt. 5:21-26; 18:15; Gal. 5:13-15).

If it is a public matter, get the correct information and, when necessary, withstand the sinner publicly to save him and others (Gal. 2:11-14).

Do not carry around wicked suspicions of others in your heart. To do so reveals prideful arrogance that damages your relationship with God and the one you ought to love as yourself (Gal. 5:14). Holding on to evil suspicions results in a bitter heart (Eph. 4:31-32).

Do not be naïve, but give others the benefit of the doubt whenever possible. Such an act of love overcomes the sin of evil surmising (1 Cor. 13:5). ■

Something’s Not Right

By James Hahn

When teachers of error are praised and teachers of truth are condemned, something’s not right. When compromisers of truth are commended for their “wonderful attitude” and defenders of truth are charged with self-righteousness, something’s not right. When false doctrine goes uncontested and truth proclaimed is called “traditionalism,” something’s not right.

Yes, all of these things are going on and something’s not right. Men can verbally declare their soundness all they want, but when they show more support for those who teach false doctrine and compromise the truth than they show for men who courageously proclaim and defend the truth something’s not right. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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