

Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 1 No. 1

October 1989

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Garland M. Robinson

The spiritual condition of the people of Judah in Jeremiah's time was deplorable. Their sad condition warranted stiff rebukes from Jehovah. They engaged in activities of which God had not commanded them. He continually sent prophets among them to call them back to his ways. "But this thing commanded I them, saying, *Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.* Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet *they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck:* they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not an-

swer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth" (Jeremiah 7:23-28).

False prophets and priests had fooled the people into thinking everything was fine. It was more pleasant to listen to their "good news" than Jeremiah's "bad news." Jeremiah 6:14 says, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." God's cry for the people to return to him was crucial and decisive. ***"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls"*** (Jeremiah 6:16). Sadly, the response of the people was, "*we will not walk therein...We will not hearken*" (6:16, 17). What a sad day for Judah. What a dismal day for anyone who will not heed the call of God to obey his word! When king Saul brought back king Agag alive instead of killing him, Samuel said, "Hath

the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22). Saul's sin was one of rebellion (v.23). So is everyone who does not heed God's word and obey what it says!

THE RESTORATION PLEA

Does God no longer desire for people to follow his commands? He has always desired it! Jesus taught it! *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love"* (John 15:10). Love for God, is love for his way. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15).

The command of Jeremiah 6:16 to "seek the old paths" is as relevant today as it was then. Peter wrote, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."* (I Peter 4:11). To speak as the oracles of God is the restoration plea, to walk in "the old paths" is the restoration in practice. From the late 1700's to the present, there have been men, both small and great, pleading for a return to the ancient order of things. Their plea has been and is: "Back to the Bible," "Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent" and, "Let us call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways."

Seeking the "old paths" is not a cry to return to Bethany or Cane Ridge, Nashville or Cincinnati, but back to Jerusalem of the first century. We need the same gospel that was preached then preached today – ringing from every housetop in every land. May we never cease to contend to that end. May we never rest until we have

done what we can to accomplish it.

THE RELEVANCY OF THE PLEA

"The time is now and the place of action is here for the emphasis upon the restoration plea. We need to plead for a return to the ancient order until practice conforms with the plea. This applies to the religious world in general but to the Lord's church in many places specifically (Romans 2:1-3, 21-22; 14:22). The shuffling feet of a new generation marches upon the scene as an older generation with muffled voices pass on to distant points. Every generation must be taught the fundamentals (Judges 2:7-10). Even among those who have heard the first principles of the oracles of God (what some may erroneously think of as "worn out truths"), there is a need to remind them again of these eternal verities (II Peter 1:12-15; 3:1-2). The time is urgent that we plead for a return to the Bible to prevent some from departing from the faith (Hebrews 2:1-4). We must contend for the faith lest many leave the old paths and turn to the doctrines and commandments of men (Jude 3; Matthew 15:8-9). The restoration plea is a plea for unity. It is a call for all men to stand upon the Bible and the Bible alone (I Corinthians 1:10; John 17:20-21)." (Ben F. Vick, Jr., **Speak As The Oracles**, May 1989, pp.8-9)

God has always desired that men seek him. On Mar's Hill Paul preached men *"should seek the Lord"* and *"feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us"* (Acts 17:22-28). This same attitude should possess men today to return to *"the old paths,"* the way of Jehovah. All who do not do so are surely "without excuse" at the judgment.

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Demands Of The Old Paths

Sidney White

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16). This oft quoted passage, a plea for the Israelites to return to God's way, is as meaningful today as when given to Jeremiah by God. The significance of the passage is just as binding today as ever. Wholesale changes are taking place among God's people - changes that are certainly not according to God's direction. For us to properly apply the principle of this passage in the church today, we must understand some demands of God's way.

First, we must accept the fact that God has spoken to us today. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2a). "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5). "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). Thus, the writings of the New Testament are given to direct our paths today.

Second, understanding that God has spoken to us today, the old paths demand to be read and studied. Far too much time and attention is spent on denominational

methodology and far too little on the old paths. If we want to develop a great soul winning program, do we examine the methods of some fast growing denominational organization or do we examine the activities of the early Christians as recorded in the Bible? Copying denominationalism will ultimately lead to more denominationalism. We had better re-evaluate our sources of instruction. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15).

Third, the old paths demand to be believed. "I know that is what it says, but..." is a phrase heard all too often. God told Israel, "I have loved you," but Israel said, "We don't believe it." "Without faith it is impossible to please him..." (Hebrews 11:6).

Fourth, the old paths demand to be obeyed. We say that we study and believe the word of God, but do we? Consider some of the changes that are taking place in organization, worship and work of the church. Much of what is taking place in the church and called the work of the church has no similarity at all to the church and its work that we read about in the New Testament. How many churches do you know of that obeys the teaching of the old paths to "*withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly*" (II Thess. 3:6)? How often do we find the kind of hospitality and fellowship today that characterized the church in the first

century? How many pulpits today are filled with preaching that would follow the pattern of I Peter 4:11? Too much "preaching" gives the hearer nothing but oracles of men, not the oracles of God. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Fifth, the old paths demand that we reject all other teachings. Yet the cry of our day is "fellowship everybody." "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). In

spite of the efforts by some to distort and twist the meaning of the passage, II John 9-10 still reads, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed...."

If we are going to stay with or return to the old paths, these demands must be met.

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Wrath Of The Old Paths

Jimmy W. Bates

The prophet Jeremiah called upon the people of Judah to "*ask for the old paths*" and "*walk therein...but they said, we will not walk therein*" (Jeremiah 6:16). From the beginning of man there have been basically two "paths" in which he may walk. He can walk or live according to the will (instructions) of God which Jeremiah referred to as "the old paths," or he can reject the will of God and walk in the paths of satan. God created man with the power to choose which path he will follow (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-6). Every individual **must** choose (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15). The paths of God and satan go in opposite directions (Matthew 7:13-14) and there are no paths in between, no middle ground (Matthew 6:24; 12:30; Romans

6:16). One is either walking in "the old paths" or he is walking in the paths of satan.

While man has the power to choose and must choose one or the other, **he cannot escape the consequences of the choice he makes!** Through the pages of the Bible, God uses two great incentives to encourage us to make the right choice and walk in "the old paths."

One, he shows the consequences of "walking therein" (Jeremiah 6:16), which involves his love, mercy, goodness, and blessings toward those who make that good choice (cf. Romans 2:4). Hundreds of examples could be given to show God blesses those who follow his instructions.

Two, God shows the consequences

of failing to walk in the old paths, which involves his wrath (punishment) upon those who make that poor choice. Moses declared to the second generation Israelites that they had two choices; they could *"love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments"* and receive God's blessings or, they could turn away from God and *"surely perish"* (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). The apostle Paul warned, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise-thou also shalt be cut off" (Romans 11:22). The burden of this article is to show the wrath of God upon those who reject "the old paths!"

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

God warned **Adam and Eve** of what the consequences would be if they ate of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17), and when they rejected God's instructions, they learned that God meant what he said (Genesis 3). When **Cain** departed from God's will he suffered the consequences (Genesis 4). The majority of the **earth's population** was destroyed by the flood because they rejected the paths of God (Genesis 6-8). In Genesis 19, God showed the cities of **Sodom and Gomorrah** the consequences of their grievous sins of sodomy or homosexuality as he rained upon them brimstone and fire out of heaven destroying them. The **Israelites** were the recipients of God's wrath on numerous occasions because of their rebellion and refusal to walk in the paths of God (cf. Exodus 32; Numbers

11, 16, 21; I Corinthians 10). **Nadab and Abihu** (priests) were devoured by fire from the Lord because they used a fire to burn the incense that was unauthorized by the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-2). The prophets penned God's wrath against the nations of **Israel and Judah** because they would not walk in "the old paths."

The wrath of God will be brought upon the **unbeliever** (John 3:36), the **ungodly and unrighteous** (Rom. 1:18; 2:8), the **disobedient** (Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6), the **false teacher** (Gal. 1:8-9; II John 9-11), because all such involves failure to walk in "the old paths." **Ananias and Sapphira** were the recipients of God's wrath upon their disobedience (Acts 5). All that the Bible says about hell is a reminder to us of the consequences of failing to walk in the paths of God (cf. Matthew 10:28; 23:33; 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

THE WARNINGS OF JEREMIAH NEEDED TODAY

God called Jeremiah to prophesy to the nation of Judah (1:4-5). God's people were on the brink of 70 years captivity. Jeremiah warned them of God's wrath unless they repented (6:11-12; 7:1-7).

Some of the same attitudes and sins that led to God's wrath upon Judah, exists in the church today!

1. *The word of the Lord was a reproach to them* (6:10). They had no delight in it. Why do many members of the church refuse to attend Bible classes, Gospel meetings, etc.? They have no delight in the word of God! They do not hunger and thirst after

righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

2. *"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness"* (6:13). One of the greatest hindrances to the cause of Christ today is the obsession with material gain by so many in the church (cf. Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:5).

3. *Although they were repeatedly warned, they refused to recognize error and said, "peace, peace, when there is no peace"* (6:14). Many in the church have the same attitude today! They refuse to hear warnings of error and departures from the old paths!

4. *"They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush"* (6:15). No sense of shame, no regret. They were

deceived and hardened (cf. Hebrews 13:3). The same could be said of many in the church today with regards to modesty, social drinking, dancing, vulgar language, etc.

5. *They refused to walk in the old paths* (6:16). By attitude and practice many today are saying, "we will not walk in the old paths!"

The nation of Judah went into 70 long years of captivity because she would not heed the warnings of God through Jeremiah. She suffered the consequences (God's wrath) for refusing to walk in the old paths. Will we make the same mistake? **If you refuse to walk in the old paths, then expect for the wrath of God!**

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Rewards Of The Old Paths

Ken Burleson

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16). There was a blessing to be had if they walked in the old paths. They had the promise of rest for their souls if they walked in the old paths. But they said "...we will not walk therein." They could not expect to have rest for their souls, because they were not willing to walk in the old paths. It is hard to imagine

one refusing such a wonderful blessing. It is a sad commentary but the majority of people are like that today.

God has promised blessings for us if we will do his will. Many today, by word or action say, "we will not do his will."

God has promised "...all spiritual blessings in Christ," this centers upon the immediate blessings when we obey Him. He has promised eternal life to His children that remain faithful, this is a future blessing to be received at the judgement day.

ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The spiritual blessings are many. The promise of receiving them is dependent upon being in Christ. When one hears the word of God and believes it, repents of his sins, confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he can be baptized into Christ. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Some of the spiritual blessings are as follows:

Redemption. One is redeemed through the blood of Christ. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). One is redeemed through the blood of Christ when he obeys the gospel and if he walks in the light, His blood continues to cleanse him. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Forgiveness of sins. One of the greatest blessings in this life is the forgiveness of sins. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Jesus shed His blood so that man can have remission of sins. "For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Fellowship. This too is a great

blessing to man. By having fellowship, we draw strength from one another that we may be able to cope with the evils of the day. It is obvious, by the failure to take advantage of the opportunities to have fellowship, that many do not realize the importance and benefits of it. If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have the blessing of fellowship. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). If we are in fellowship with God then we have fellowship with all who are in fellowship with Him.

Peace with God. When one obeys the gospel and lives faithful to God he has peace that no one outside of Christ has. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The peace that comes through knowing that our sins are forgiven is a tremendous blessing that comes from God. What a reward! We have peace that passeth all understanding. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Salvation. One who is lost is alienated from God, in darkness, without hope and without God. When he by obedience to God's will is saved he has: God, fellowship with God, hope, and is no longer in darkness but in light. A wonderful blessing indeed. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). It is by the grace of God that salvation came. "For the grace of God that

bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). In order for man to have salvation he must apply the grace of God by obedience to God's will.

ETERNAL LIFE

Though eternal life is a spiritual blessing yet to come, it stands as the ultimate of all blessings. If one has been blessed with all the spiritual blessings mentioned under the preceding point, then eternal life will be that final reward at the judgement day. "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "...Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).

CONCLUSION

The rewards of walking in the old paths are many. God has promised these rewards and if we do His will, we will receive them. When God makes a promise we can be sure that He will keep it. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). May we be encouraged to walk in the old paths!

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This is the first issue of a gospel paper that is being sent forth to teach and admonish members of the Lord's kingdom, especially in the state of Mississippi. Our goal is to teach God's word faithfully in every area. There is so much that needs to be done by way of instructing brethren to grow in the Lord. Study these things carefully! This work is supported by individual Christians and sister congregations. Your cooperation in this regard is appreciated. —The elders

Seek The Old Paths is a publication of the East Corinth church of Christ and is under the oversight of its elders. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:1; II Peter 1:12. Manuscripts are welcome.

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