

Walking in the Old Paths — The Good Way

In principle, “the old paths” for men today would be the New Covenant, as established in the first century. Not only is this “the good way,” it is the only way to have God’s approval. However, as in the days of Jeremiah, many will not walk therein.

The Israelites were God’s chosen people for a specific purpose, that of bringing our Savior into the world. God blessed these people greatly, bringing them out of the Egyptian bondage, and supplying them with various needs as they journeyed toward the bountiful promised land.

In spite of God’s abundant blessings, however, the Israelites often went astray. When the Lord had brought them out of the bondage in Egypt into a good land with many good things, He warned them not to forget. The Lord said: *Then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage* (Deut. 6:10-12).

The Psalmist said of the ungrateful Israelites: *They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel: but they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert* (Ps. 106:13-14).

The thankless Israelites, even though blessed as God’s chosen people, continued their pattern of departures from God down through the centuries. We shall look into Jeremiah’s record of the Israelites in the period about 600 BC. There are a great many good lessons to be learned by God’s people in our day.

JEREMIAH’S DESCRIPTION OF AND COUNSEL TO THE ISRAELITES

Jeremiah, called “the weeping prophet” because of his deep concern for the Israelites, describes their evils and warns them of the consequences of evil. Jeremiah begins by saying: *“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water”* (Jer. 2:13). Then God asks: *“Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forsaken me days without number”* (Jer. 2:32). These rhetorical questions show just how unmindful of God’s will these people were.

Now, further, the error of the Israelites and their love of it are revealed: *“The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?”* (Jer. 5:31). People who are simply ignorant of God’s truth may be taught, but when people love error teaching them is another matter. Those who don’t want the truth can hardly be taught it.

Jeremiah continues by describing, advising and warning the Israelites. Listen to his counsel:

“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. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it” (Jer. 6:16-19).

There is hardly a better example of people departing from God’s way and going their own way. It could not be made clearer that God will bring evil upon these people. We see the very same thing happening in our time, that is, people turning aside from God’s will and stubbornly refusing to obey it.

WALKING IN THE OLD PATHS — THE GOOD WAY

The “old paths” were the “paths” which were approved of God, by his word, his law. Later Jeremiah would say, *“Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”* (Jer. 10:23).

God’s way, *“the old paths,”* is the *“good way.”* Not only is it the “good way,” it is the only way to have God’s approval. That way is good because it offers **rest for the soul**. This, the greatest blessing which man can receive, is the one for which we should long. Yet, with numberless multitudes it boils down to the sad fact that, like the Israelites, they will not walk therein. On every hand people are acting exactly as they acted, that is, rejecting God’s law.

In Christ’s universal invitation he said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls”* (Matt. 11:28-29).

The frightening fact is that God will bring evil upon those disobedient people who refuse the Lord’s invitation. God did just that with the Israelites when they were carried away into captivity and exile. Those who refuse to walk in *“the old paths”* of the Lord today have in store nothing but eternal punishment. The same is true of those who stake their soul’s well-being upon that which is not according to truth. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that, *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Prov. 14:12). It is the case today that there are multitudes of ways which “seem right,” which will if followed end in spiritual death, the loss of one’s soul.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON FOR US

The apostle Paul said, *“For whatsoever things which were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (Rom. 15:4). It is a matter of fact that we often overlook great lessons in the Old Testament, which would help us in living the Christian life. I heard the story of an athletic instructor who was speaking to his athletes. He did an illustration to show that the use of alcohol was very detrimental. He dropped a live worm into a glass of alcohol. Death occurred instantly! He then posed a question to his students, “What does that teach you about the use of alcohol?” One observing student spoke up, saying, “If you use alcohol you will never have worms.”

A needed lesson for us is that if we would have **rest for our souls** we have no choice but to walk in God’s “old paths,” that is, His word as it now applies to us. The “old paths” of which

Jeremiah spoke referred to the Old Law, God's law for the Jews. We certainly are not to walk in that law today. It has been abolished, having been "nailed to the cross" (Col. 2:14). But in principle we must still walk in God's "old paths" with respect to the New Covenant and Christianity, which became a reality in the first century. The old paths for the Christian are found in the New Testament pattern of the first century. This involves **the one, distinctive, blood bought, body of Christ, the one church**, of which Christ is the head and savior. The rest for the soul can not be found elsewhere. To us the Lord's Path is more than two thousand years old. It is "old" in years but just as true as in its beginning. To some, however, it is "too old." It is outdated and needs to be changed. There is a lot of truth in the saying, if understood, that "If it is true it is not new, and if it is new it is not true." But more than a few are looking for new things, things which aren't true.

Entrance in to the "one body" is by **faith, repentance, confession and baptism** into Christ for the remission of sins. These are "steps" by which people get "into" Christ, where salvation is found (2 Tim. 2:10). Some of our liberal brethren decry the idea of steps being taken to get into Christ. Not only that, but some have gone so far as to suggest that people may be saved without taking that step of baptism which puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:27).

To enjoy that eternal rest for our souls, we must, as members of God's family, the church (1 Tim. 3:15), work and worship according to the "*doctrine of Christ*" (2 Jno. 9). God will bring evil upon us if we disobey. Those who do not obey the Gospel of Christ, should heed the stern warning Paul gave the Thessalonians, which applies to man today:

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Whatever we do in serving our Lord must be done by the authority of Christ, but in our day it is a common thing for people to act without that essential authority. To do so is to disregard Paul's command to the Colossian brethren: "*And whatsoever do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*" (Col. 3:17).

What we do in "*word or deed*" certainly includes our worship. These five "acts of reverence paid to God by man," are: singing, praying, the Lord's supper, giving, and the speaking and hearing of God's word. Acting only "*in the name of the Lord Jesus,*" rules out much of what is being practiced in the so-called worship of today. A "thus saith the Lord" means little.

When we think of the "old paths" of today, we need to bear in mind that many religious people are not now, nor have they ever been, in the "old paths." It is a great duty and challenge to us to encourage them to walk therein.

COMPARING TODAY'S CHURCH WITH THE ISRAELITES IN JEREMIAH'S DAY

More and more I come to realize that people don't change very much. Another thing that I have come to realize, as a result of spending about five years with people in other countries, people are so much alike in basic and fundamental things, regardless of what country may be their homeland. Some differences in customs, language, appearance, etc. are quite evident. But there is little difference in the basic fundamentals. We can see why God's word serves as an all-sufficient guide for all mankind.

The similarities between the Israelites and people of the church today is no less than amazing. As we search the history of the Israelites it is clearly evident that their respect for God's way was very little. Their fall for error was a very common occurrence. We are seeing exactly the same thing in the Lord's church today, and the condition is worsening.

We are in the throes of apostasy this very day! This was an apt description of the Israelites in many periods of their history. In my almost fifty years of preaching I've seen things which were at one time almost unbelievable, come to pass. Many brethren, some who are younger and others who are quite indifferent, are virtually unaware of this change. I well remember coming home from Taiwan after a little more than three years, and seeing the changes which had taken place in the church in that short time. It is indeed much later than so many people think.

A thing which is most disturbing to God-fearing brethren is the present indifference being evidenced toward the prevailing state of indifference. There aren't enough "weeping" teachers, preachers, elders and other members of the church who are emulating the prophet Jeremiah. I've often wondered about our brethren who many years ago went before us, trying to extricate people from the shackles of denominationalism. Just what would they think if they could see today's condition when there is on the part of a great many brethren a growing affinity for the man-made churches. I pray for the conversion of those who are trying to take us away from God's Old Paths, and for their utter failure if they can't be converted. Few who turn away from God's truth are converted again.

Another godly person who wept over the conditions of brethren, was Paul the apostle. Urging the Philippian brethren to be followers of him as an example, he said: "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ*" (Phil. 13:17-18). Paul said to the elders at Ephesus: "*Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears*" (Acts 20:31). The "don't care" attitude on the part of so many is in a great measure responsible for the current spiritual weakness. Our Lord must weep bitterly over the present condition as He did over the city of Jerusalem.

Today, many within the Lord's blood-bought church are saying by their actions, "We will not walk in the Old Paths, the good way." We will not "hearken." Evil will surely come upon these people in the form of spiritual death and eternal destruction in the world to come.

"Prophets," (teachers and preachers) are prophesying (teaching) falsely. As tragic as that is, it is even more so that people "love to have it so." What are they going to do in the end? Are we as concerned as we should be? If they are not "converted" (Jas. 5:19-20), they will be turned away forever on the day of judgment.

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THOSE WHO REFUSE TO WALK IN GOD'S "OLD PATHS"

Some don't like to hear about dangers confronting God's people. Israel didn't like it either. As it is so common today for people to blame someone else for their own faults, those who refuse to walk in the old paths often unjustly criticize those who still look to God's word as their only guide, and walk therein. We may be referred to as: Alarmists, Pessimists, Negative minded, Watchdogs, Unloving, and other uncomplimentary terms.

Those who have gone off even accuse the faithful of causing division. A lady consigned my wife and me to hell for opposing Rubel Shelly, who stands as the epitome of apostasy.

Jeremiah, who stood for the truth in his day, was severely persecuted without just cause. Paul reminds us through Timothy, “*Yea, and all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). The time was that brethren would be commended for upholding God’s word and contending for the faith. It is different now, in that people are often criticized for standing for the truth. Those critics often appear to be among that number which Peter described as being “*willingly ignorant*” (2 Pet. 3:5). Hosea’s warning that people are destroyed for “*lack of knowledge*” (Hos. 4:6), goes unheeded by those who reject knowledge.

If brethren don’t wake up, one day we, our children and grandchildren, won’t have access to the true church as most of us have had. This is the case even today in too many places. A message heard often is to the effect that it is difficult to find a place where one can worship with a good conscience. This condition is wide-spread. Faithful congregations are becoming fewer and fewer even here in the “Bible belt.”

We’ve heard that the ostrich buries its head in the sand. I’m not sure that that is actually true, but it is true that many people are closing their eyes and stopping their ears to reality, and ignoring the many warnings of danger in the New Testament, with regard to false teachers.

SOME AREAS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE OLD PATHS

Let it not be said that I believe every member of the church is departing from the Old Paths. They aren’t, and thank God for those who still care, those who are standing fast in the faith at all costs, unwilling to compromise their convictions to any degree. But I do say, without hesitation, that a great portion of the church has already left the Old Paths, and countless congregations are in the process of doing so. Most large congregations that I know about are not standing up for the faith as they should. Also, let it be noted, that many very small ones are following the larger ones in the course of apostasy. Years ago those of us here in the south, the “Bible belt,” would hear of error in congregations in far off places such as Chicago or somewhere in California. Now, error is being seen in even the small country congregations which used to be known for standing fast, at least in some of the fundamentals of the faith.

Needless to say that there has never in our lives been a greater need for brethren of courage who have strong convictions and are unafraid to stand for the “good way.” There is a great need for men like Daniel. The story was told of a teacher who was teaching a class of youngsters. She posed the question: “Why was Daniel not eaten when he was thrown in the lion’s den?” A little body raised his hand and responded, saying, “Because he was all backbone.” We need brethren like Paul, who was “*set for the defence of the gospel*” (Phil. 1:17).

It is a sign of lack of loyalty when brethren are so opposed to calling the names of those who are false teachers, even those who are “*enemies of the cross of Christ*” (Phil. 3:18). The proper attitude should be manifested in calling attention to false teachers, that is, without sarcasm and a haughty spirit. But Paul called the names of Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Their word would “*eat as doth a canker,*” and they had “*erred*” concerning the truth, saying the resurrection was already past. The result was the overthrowing of the faith of some. Paul called the name of Demas, and pointed out that the love of the world was the cause for his forsaking him. Paul called attention to Hymenaeus and Alexander. They had made “*shipwreck*” the faith of some (I Tim. 1:19-20).

Paul exhorted the Corinthians, “*Be ye followers of me, even as also I am of Christ*” (I Cor. 11:1). Was not Paul acting as a follower of Christ when he warned people of the danger of the

false teachers mentioned above? Christ himself used some very strong words concerning the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). When people are so set against calling the names of false teachers, it makes one wonder as to whose side they are on. It doesn't appear to be the Lord's.

Over the years I've heard various people say, "I don't believe in calling names." I've learned that in many cases they don't believe in calling the names of false teachers, in a critical way by pointing out their error. Some of these critics of name calling would have no objection to "calling the name" of false teachers in a positive way.

Those who do not believe in calling names by marking those who "*cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine*" which they had learned (Rom. 16:17-8), simply don't believe in following clear New Testament teaching.

If we love the church of God, we will warn people of those who are destroying God's children by leading them astray. Such men as: Randy Mayeux, Mike Cope, Jeff Walling, Joe Beam, Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado and a host of others, including some in our own area, are enemies of the cross of Christ.

In spite of the hurt which such men as the above are doing to the cause of Christ, there are those who think we should keep quiet and not warn people of this danger. As a personal example, more than ten years ago I was fired by a congregation. The only reason ever given for firing me was that I called the name of Rubel Shelly, along with a few others of those listed above, as an example of those who would not walk in the "old paths" of Jeremiah 6:16.

Not only are we not to have "*fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,*" but we are to "*reprove them*" (Eph. 5:11). Outrageous things happen now and there is little or no outrage.

More and more preachers no longer stand for the unadulterated truth of God. A number of factors could be involved, but in some cases the preacher has a good setup and he doesn't want to jeopardize his position. The goal of some seems to be to have the praise of men, though God's approval is lacking. Some preachers indicate that they "Have Bible and will travel," and will say what the people want to hear, if the price is right. These might be called hirelings. A growing number of people want to hear less than the whole truth and there are preachers who are ready and willing to accommodate them.

Today, there are a number of things which remind us of the words of Isaiah: "*Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits*" (Isa. 30:8-10). It is hard to understand why people want to be misled, but that it appears that way cannot be denied.

Elders who are truly doing the God-given work of elders are few and far between. Being an elder is a function, not just the wearing of a title. Guarding the flock against error, the duty of elders, is often lacking. A few years ago a congregation had a preacher, who is noted for his error, scheduled for a meeting. Well, how would they deal with problem. Here is how they dealt (?) with it. They cut the meeting down to Wednesday night. Three days rather than a week!

If elders would hold fast the faithful word, they could by "*sound doctrine both...exhort and ...convince the gainsayers*" (Tit. 1:9). In too many cases nowadays the elders are out front with the gainsayers, giving them open access to their flocks. And, the subject of "church discipline," What's that?

Worship is now swiftly gravitating toward a "fun thing" where reverence and respect are lacking. The "bill of fare" may include hand clapping, drama teams, praise teams, solos, duets, choirs,

jokesters as preachers, “A cappella,” and others. Children are now looking for “fun” but they are not alone. Adults are providing it and it seems that they also like it.

It is indeed a most serious matter that reverence and respect are so often lacking in that which is supposed to be worship. I was at a congregation recently where the song leader just broke out singing some three or four minutes before the worship period was to begin. About half the members were in the auditorium with a number of people just milling about. Others begin to wander into the auditorium. A question arose in my mind, “Just how can people be worshipping in the midst of bedlam?” I talked with the song leader and a brother whom I believe was one of the elders about the abuse of singing. The brother whom I believe was an elder said, “Oh, we just sing them in.”

More and more of our brethren are saying that the use of instrumental music in worship is just a matter of opinion. Some who claim to be brethren are already using it. Here in our own area a one minute sermonette is accompanied by organ music which is sometimes several decibels louder than the speaker. If one minute, why not two? If two, why not five? If five, why not twenty-five? Is it only a matter of time until we see the use of the instrument on a wide scale?

It seems that the various gimmicks now being used to draw people indicate a lack of faith in the gospel of Christ to accomplish its God-given purpose. God’s drawing power is the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17), and it is folly for men to think they can improve upon God’s plans.

Another sign of departure from the Old Paths is the undue exaltation of men. Men are being followed as they seek notoriety and acclaim. Attention is being taken away from God. Some men within our brotherhood are being followed virtually without any question as to what they stand for. It is the man, not the Lord, that is often put forth as being somewhat.

In recent years we have heard a great deal about religious cults. Who would have thought we would actually see the time when we have mini-cults within the church? Well, that time has come. Though members of the church do not follow a man to the point of committing suicide, as did the Jim Jones followers, but they do follow men in whatever direction they take, regardless of how much the direction is in error. This is a fact which cannot be denied. It happens in our part of the country as it does in other places. Rubel Shelly is one example, but there are others who have their followers but do not have the same notoriety as does Rubel Shelly.

Degrees in education are some times more important than what a preacher knows about God’s word and the respect he may have for it. Some years ago I attended a meeting in which the preacher was “doctored” by the local preacher a half-dozen times or more and “brothered” only once. True Christianity is characterized by humility, not ostentation. There is a serious lack of reverence and respect now.

A most serious matter now confronting our brethren is the lack of the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church and basics and fundamentals of the gospel of Christ, being taught and emphasized by preachers and teachers. Some have gone so far as to claim there are Christians in the man-made churches. The rash of programs in recent years, such as the “Jubilees” (now defunct), “Soul Winning Workshops,” “Unity Summits,” along with “progressive worship,” “contemporary worship,” “special programs” for holidays, the “Community Church” and a host of other things, are sowing the seeds of apostasy. Compromise is in the air. The fellowshipping of denominations is not now uncommon. Even the conditions of obedience to the gospel are being compromised.

A powerful example of the turn toward denominationalism goes back several years. The Madison church of Christ, near Nashville has been a great influence upon our brotherhood in days gone by. It is now in a turmoil and hundreds have gone away to other places. But several years ago the

following item was put out by the Madison Church of Christ Youth Family, Tony Woodall/Regan Glenn, Teen Life Ministers. Note the wording carefully:

“Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need forgiveness from You. I believe You died on the cross and rose again from the dead in order that I might receive eternal life. I turn from my sin and ask forgiveness from you. Right now I invite You into my heart to be my Savior and Lord. Thank you for hearing my prayer and giving me Your gift of eternal life. In Jesus name, Amen.”

The above was put forth while the late Ira North was still living. This shows just how far the Madison church had gone in propagating outright denominationalism instead of the true gospel of Christ. If any retraction was made of that rank error it has escaped my attention.

In more recent times, Dec. 1996, a similar plea of error was set forth by Max Lucado by way of Radio Station KJAK, Lubbock, Texas. Speaking of the “eternal security” which one has by adoption, an illustration he used, Max Lucado says the following:

“That’s what God offers you. No quiz, no examination. All you have to do is say ‘yes’ to the Father. And many of you have done that. But I have a hunch that there are a few of you listening, even now, and God is using this to pull on your heart. The Holy Spirit is informing you of something that you have never really heard before — and that is, that God is ready to be your Father. Maybe you never understood that the invitation was for everyone. Maybe you thought that you were unworthy. Maybe now you do understand. God will make you worthy, and the invitation is for you. And all you have to do is to call him Father. Just turn your heart to him right now as I am speaking. Call him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don’t you do that?”

“Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins.. I give you my tears. I give you my fears. I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.”

Lucado goes on to say in that same sermon (?) the following: “I want to encourage you to find a church. I want you to be baptized. I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don’t want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.”

The two examples above should serve as eyeopeners to concerned brethren. In the case of Max Lucado, there are those who claim to be Christians who uphold this teacher of error. If such false teachers did not have supporters they would soon be forgotten. When people follow a man of error, even to the point of upholding him, they are no longer worthy of the Lord. Such people are seldom converted to the truth which they may have at one time upheld. If they can’t be converted (Jas. 5:19-20) it would be a blessing if they completely separated themselves from any connection with our Lord’s church. It seems, however, that some want to hang on and do as much damage as possible. If anyone doubts this, it would be good for that one to read the stern warnings of apostasy in the New Testament.

Another area of departure from the Old Paths is in the use of faulty versions of the Bible. The NIV is being used extensively now. The serious errors in that version are simply a matter of record that anyone can see, if they so desire. We shall note just a few of the many errors. Original sin is taught by Psalm 51:5. Faith only is taught by Romans 1:17; 4:5;10:10. Error on marriage and

divorce is taught in Matthew 19:9. Acts 16:14 teaches the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, the NIV teaches that Christ did not abolish the Law of Moses (Matt. 5:17). That the church was built on Peter is another false teaching of the NIV (Matt. 16:18).

In view of the above errors of the NIV and others unmentioned, why do brethren want to use it? I find it rather amazing that some brethren who would be considered well educated cannot understand the King James Version of the Bible or the American Standard of 1901. The few archaic words of the KJV can be found in a dollar dictionary, and in most cases it is clear as to what the meaning is without a dictionary.

There is something important that I have observed over the years. That is, those who are so bent on using the NIV or some other unreliable modern version, do not show signs of spiritual maturity as a result of such usage. In fact, it will be found to be true in a greater portion of the cases where these modern versions are used, that people have a tendency toward liberalism in other areas. In the most liberal congregations will be found a greater use of such versions.

CONCLUSION

The above has been written with the hope that some might be encouraged to serve the Lord in a more devoted way, by upholding God's truth and standing fast against the "devices" and "wiles" of the devil. Some may think that it does little good to warn brethren, but as long as I'm able I will continue to do so. Brethren, the Lord's church is hurting! If ever there was a time, and if we truly love Christ and His church, it is now time to stand up and be counted on the Lord's side. "Heaven will surely be worth it all," but if we don't stand up for our Lord it will never be ours to enjoy. Let us encourage each other; let us stand fast in and contend for the faith as our Lord would have His servants do.

- - Walter W. Pigg

"Seek, And Ye Shall Find"

John Q. Mitchell

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "***Seek, and ye shall find***" (Matt. 7:8). Jesus uttered these weighty words more than two thousand years ago, and they are just as true and weighty now as they were when he spoke them. It is clear from the Matthew 7:7-8 record that Jesus was teaching a lesson on how to access needed blessings.

He told his audience that *seeking, knocking, and asking* is the way to obtain what one needs. In other words, be persistent in prayer. The same "***seek, and ye shall find***" applies to spiritual blessings as well as physical ones. Correct? Absolutely, for Jesus says to us that as a matter of priority we must SEEK the SPIRITUAL blessings FIRST and then the temporal blessings will be added (Matt. 6:33).

In this self-same verse Jesus is talking about SEEKING after the kingdom of God and its righteousness, that is, SEEKING after those things that are true and eternal in nature, spiritual things

that are right and cannot be wrong. Not only does this verse reveal what one should seek after, but it also brings the reader to this unavoidable extrapolation from the words “SEEK, AND YE SHALL FIND,”: These words assert that no one who earnestly and honestly **seeks after what is right**, seeks after righteousness, if you will, ever failed to find it. Thus the assurance, “*Ye SHALL find.*”

Physical and spiritual blessings, when sought after in proper sequence, unfailingly become a reality. Just as surely as the positive results of seeking, knocking and asking are guaranteed by the immutable promises of Jesus in Matthew 7:7-8, vis-à-vis temporal blessing, just that surely is the certainty of finding the Spiritual things verily sought after according to the dictates of Matthew 6:33.

Allow me now to deal more in depth with the Spiritual side of the equation, since it always rises to the level of being more important than anything else in one’s life. Obviously, billions have failed to find the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and one of the reasons why is the fact that they have not diligently sought after it. They have not conscientiously examined their thinking, their beliefs and what they practice. Nor have they made a sincere and genuine effort to seek and find those venues where the way of righteousness is being taught.

In the midst of the ubiquitous domain of denominationalism (ah, that damnable philosophy that espouses the notion that it doesn’t matter to which church you belong, for one is just as good as another, and it really doesn’t matter by what term a church is identified), people are without the truth.

In addition to these man-made churches, with their vain worship and doctrines, are the so-called great religions of the world: Buddhism, Hinduism and the religion of Islam. These religions are steeped in idolatry and false claims. Billions of adherents of these religions have either discounted the religion of Jesus or have equated it with theirs. In any case, they have failed to **seek the religion of Jesus** to the extent of putting their faith in it to the exclusion of all other religions.

Moreover, teeming millions usurp the name Christian and therefore claim to be a part of the religion called Christianity, while they teach for doctrines the commands of men (Matt. 15:8-9). They have no regard for the uniqueness of the one church which Christ built (Matt. 16:18). Just any church will not do, my friends.

Once again, I say this with sadness and utter concern (2 Pet. 3:9) that most of the religious world is on the way to perdition and eternal punishment (2 Thess. 1:7-9). This is because they have not truly SOUGHT, and in consequence, have not FOUND the knowledge and righteousness of God. Not having studied God’s word (2 Tim. 2:15) in order to discover His righteousness. Not only have they not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, they have gone about to establish their own righteousness (Rom. 10:3-4).

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Revelation, Inspiration, the Incidentals, and the “Need to Know” Plus, a Point to be Made About Christmas

Alan Adams, Assistant Editor

A recent discussion about “inspiration” has caused me to think about some things, which relate not only to the wondrous, marvelous power of the Almighty, but also some implications therefrom which have a bearing on the date of Jesus’ birth, as well as worship, and celebration built around the same, that is, Christmas as viewed by so many.

In the aforementioned discussion, a sister asked, “Do you ever think about passages like the one where Paul discusses Timothy’s stomach problems? Did the Holy Spirit inspire him to do that? Or, was that just Paul’s personal concern?” I am so fortunate to be around quite a number of thoughtful people from whom I learn a lot. We talked about this passage and other similar ones, and, in a logical way, this dovetailed right into the question of Christmas. We shall see how.

REVELATION

“Revelation” is connected to the idea of *information*. *Information* is potential knowledge. In I Corinthians 2, wherein Paul spoke of the “mystery,” and “[‘hidden’] wisdom” of God. He called such the “things” or the “deep things” because God had not “revealed” them. These “things” are no longer mystery because “unto us God revealed them through the Spirit...yea the deep things of God.”

What did Paul and the other apostles do with this “revealed” *information*? In Ephesians 3:1-4, he says essentially three things: 1, I got what I know “by revelation”; 2, I “wrote” what was “revealed” in “words”; 3, You can “read” what I wrote; and, 4, You can thereby “perceive” my understanding in the mystery of Christ. Thus, the *information* has moved from God, through the Holy Spirit, through Paul, into the written words of Paul, and finally to us. This, then, leads us to think about

INSPIRATION

Were Paul and others left to use their mortal, fallible brains and abilities to put into words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs this Divinely-given *information*? The Bible claims — which claim is demonstrable, but that is not the focus of this discussion — that is the very Word of God. Literally hundreds of times we read mere mortals making such claims as “Thus saith the Lord,” or “This is the commandment of the Lord.”

One writer has said, “Christ was as divine as God and as human as Mary...In like manner the Bible is divine in that every single original word thereof was chosen and dictated by the Holy Spirit, and it is human in that human instruments were used to receive the revelation and accurately pen the words selected by the Holy Spirit.”¹

In what must have been calming words, Jesus promised His apostles, “...be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you “ (Matt. 10:19-20). Here Jesus couples the *what* (the information) with, the *how*. Paul described the extent, the pervasiveness, of the mar-

velous promise when he said of the apostles' words, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, combining spiritual things with spiritual words" (I Cor. 2:13). Jesus viewed the Scriptures as being Divine and authoritative right down to the very "jot [and] tittle" (Matt. 5:18).

That heaven sent *information* was to priceless to be allowed to come by way of a mere mortal process. What we have: the Bible, words on pages is "every scripture inspired of God" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). "Inspired" — here far different from our common usage — comes the Greek *theopneustos*. This is a compound word, formed from the word for "God," and the word "breath." Mouth, breath, words: these things tend to travel together. What we have at our disposal, the Bible, is from the mouth of God.

Think, for a moment, about the omniscience of the Holy Spirit, whose task it was to bring to man, through man, the complete Will of God. Because when the Spirit spoke "by the mouth" (Cf. Acts 1:16), or the pen (cf. Eph. 3:4) of Paul. He (the Spirit) so thoroughly knew and infused the mind experiences, memories, tastes, vocabulary, etc. of Paul, that what came through Paul sounds so very much like Paul. The same, when He communicated through Luke, the physician. One cannot but notice the medical terms used throughout those books penned by Luke. This, in turn, leads us to ponder...

PERSONAL, INCIDENTAL (NEVER TRIVIAL). YET, INSPIRED THINGS

This brings us back to the discussion I mentioned, the one which prompted this article. Divine Revelation has provided us with all the *information* we need to know. Sometimes in movies and books, we come across that phrase, *need to know*. Usually it refers to "intelligence" matters, top secret or classified things. Such information is said to be given out only on a *need to know* basis. Well, in a sense, as seen above, God's ultimate purpose — the Christ and His church (Eph. 3:9-10) — was for a long time classified, even angels were out of the *information* circle (cf. 1Pet. 1:12). But, to finish the analogy, ever since the First Century, the Freedom of Information Act has been in effect and we have access to **everything** we *need to know*.

Operating under the premise that God has given us everything we *need to know*, and that on the basis that we *need to know* everything he has given us to know, we conclude quite naturally, that nothing in that which God has given us (the Word) is superfluous, or trivial. There are **no space fillers** (anyone who's ever written a high school term paper knows what they means!) in the Bible. Even the seemingly tedious, common, personal, incidental things recorded in the Scripture, if mulled, turned over and pondered will be seen to meet that *need to know* requirement. We don't have space to list them all, but let's consider a few —

- Paul's personal concern over Timothy's "stomach" (I Tim. 5:23). Whole sermons could be built around this. It's easy for us to get so wrapped up in our own problems and infirmities that we forget about other people. Maybe, thinking about the plight of others would help put our own in the background. Look at the very man who writes with concern about Timothy's problem — Paul. Few have ever been over the ground that man of God traversed (You may finish the sermon).

- Paul's request that Timothy bring his "cloak...books, especially the parchments" (2 Tim. 4:13). Another sermon. This epistle was written somewhere around 67 to 68 AD. Paul is quite on in years, and after all his hard and honorable work, he's in prison. Perhaps a cold and dank place, he needed something for warmth. A Chris-

tian, even one as great as Paul, is not a superman. He gets cold, he gets lonely (vs. 9), not to mention dealing with bitterness at being treated unjustly, and the fickleness of fairweather friends. But when we live in the Lord and the Lord in us, we do what we can for ourselves (the cloak), and if we are one of those “who have loved his appearing” (vs. 8), we somehow keep it all in perspective. Deny him freedom and maltreat him in other ways, but you can’t keep a good man down; you can’t lock up his soul, his mind — thus, the books and parchments. You can bet there weren’t comic books, and, they sure weren’t the TV. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if American Christians, free as birds, fat and sassy), were as concerned with study and meditation upon things holy and Divine?

- Mark said the grass was “green” (Mk. 6:39). The setting is the feeding of the five thousand. This was an unusual preacher’s problem: too many people! The Master and his disciples went “apart:” to one “desert” place, only not “apart” enough. When people want to find the Lord, there’s no stopping them. They got on a boat to go to another place of solitude, nothing doing, they “ran...on foot from all the cities and outwent them.” Imagine every local church today with members like this. I’ll guarantee there was not a single clock watching, whining person there. Anyway, to the point. Each of the Gospels records that marvelous meal that seemed destined to disaster. Each records the Lord’s order that the people “sit down in companies, about fifty each,” and Mark speaks of their sitting in “ranks.” People simply need order and organization, the notion that one can be a Christian without being a part of a local, organized church is not in the Bible. Matthew shows that the Lord told them to “sit down on the grass.” Our Lord is never inconsiderate or unthoughtful, neither should we be. John adds the element “much grass,” and then beloved John Mark says (and I’ve passed over this many times) it was “green grass.”

Space filler? Not on your life. Naturally, each writer, though imbued with and guided by the blessed Spirit of God was concerned with historical detail. You see, this is one among a million things that separates Christianity from every human religion. It has been meticulously recorded as it unfolded from Adam to Jesus, then on through the Acts. Try as he might, the infidel has never found Holy Writ in error, on even the quaintest detail.

True, “flesh and blood” are not going to ultimately “inherit the kingdom” (I Cor. 15:50)....., but we do start out the journey encamped in this “tabernacle” (2 Cor. 5:1). Mark’s “green” grass appeals to the aesthetic part of man, reminding us that “God giveth us all things richly to enjoy” (I Tim. 6:17), and that we ought to, periodically, “stop and smell the roses.” It also tells me that the Savior was concerned about comfort and beauty. If he was that concerned about “green” grass, even “much” grass on this planet that will one day be “burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10), then can you imagine what He has prepared for us *over there* (John 14:2)?

WHAT’S THIS GOT TO DO WITH CHRISTMAS?

As stated, in the conversation that sparked all this, I found myself finally thinking of Christmas, and the normally conceded fact that it’s **not in the Bible**. But now think about it from this angle: If the Holy Spirit — given our *need to know* what we need to know — used such incidentals as “green” grass, Timothy’s “stomach,” Paul’s “cloak,” as well as literally thousands of other such incidentals, why then do you suppose he left out the date of the most famous birth in history? I

guess we don't *need to know*. Not only that, given the grand-scale nature of the religious celebration of Christmas, why didn't the Holy Spirit put anything in the Bible about *when* and *how* it ought to be done? If we don't *need to know* anything about such a celebration, then we sure as the world don't need to be doing like the Lord said of the Samaritans, "worship[ping] that which [we] know not" (Jno. 4:22).

Think about James, the half-brother of Jesus. he had to have known the month and day on which his brother was born as surely as I know the same information about my brothers. He (James) was one through whom the Holy Spirit set forth things we *need to know* (the Book of James), and yet he makes no mention of what millions fervently believe they do know and need.

Think about the "green" grass and December 25th with all the religious pageantry and circumstance that goes with it. Let's stick with the "green" grass and all the other things set forth in Holy Writ. Need them, Know them, and Do them with all your being.

There is one day — no, two days — on which the Holy Spirit has given us information which we *need to know*. One is the first day of the week. On this day, the Savior arose from the dead. On this day, the gospel was preached in fact, and saved persons were "added to the church" (Ac. 2:47). On this day, Christians came together as a body, in each locality, for worship (I Cor. 11:16; 16:2). On "the first day of every week" (NASB), Christians will commemorate every aspect of the life of Jesus, including His birth, but most especially his death and resurrection (I Cor. 11:26).

The other day is the day of judgment (Rom. 2:5-10). We need *only to know* that it is coming and we must be prepared. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith" we *need to know*.

1. Winkler, Wendell, (1979) *The Holy Scriptures*, p. 298

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Beware of Cults – Inside or Outside the Church

In recent years especially, we have heard much about religious cults: Jim Jones, Waco, Heavens Gate, Moonies, and others. Cults: Mormons, Christian Scientist, Seventh Day Adventist, and Jehovah Witnesses have been around a long time.

Within the church, the following of men has been a problem from early on. It is more especially in more recent times that we have seen an upsurge in the following of men. Out front would be men like Max Lucado and Rubel Shelly. There are a great many others, most of whom do not have the notoriety of these two. There are a great many others who have followers which would qualify as "cultic" or the leaders of a cult.

With regard to "cults" within the church, I'm using the following *Webster's* definitions: "2. a group that devotes itself to or venerates a person, ideal, fad, etc." 5. of, for, or attracting a small group of devotees..." These people follow a leader in a blind sort of way. Wherever their

leader goes they will follow. Their loyalty to their leader is stronger than their loyalty to God's word. They demonstrate this by following the leader when he is clearly in error, and quite often they stubbornly refuse to give ear to the truth, but reject it. Their attitude toward those who may call attention to their leader's error is not in any sense kind, but some times rather irate. Another characteristic of these people is that they almost never in their criticism of those who believe in speaking only where the Bible speaks, and remaining silent where it is silent, show from God's word the basis of their criticism. This is another indication that loyalty to the leader is stronger than God's soul-saving word.

These cults within the church are in many places. They are in our area, and in other areas across our nation, based on information which is readily available. They are doing great hurt to the Lord's church! Their influence is such that some brethren seem to be afraid to withstand these enemies of truth. This allows error to continue its erosion of "the faith" which only a few decades ago was upheld by most of our brethren.

My attention to religious cults was prompted by a happening within the Jehovah's Witnesses cult in this area, and the appearance of cults within the church. The matter to which I'm giving attention got national attention in recent times. In the following we are going to print part of an article from a NYTimes.com Article: "Ousted Members Contend Jehovah's Witnesses' Abuse Policy Hides Offenses." The article by Laurie Goodstein was dated August 11, 2002. Draffenville, KY is only a short distance from where we live. Note the following:

"William Bowen always considered himself a devout Jehovah's Witness. As a child, he felt it was his duty to go door to door passing out the church's magazine, The Watchtower. Later as an elder in his Kentucky congregation, he said he saw it was his duty to inform church officials that a fellow elder had abused a child.

"But when Mr. Bowen contacted the church's headquarters in Brooklyn, he says, he was rebuffed. Frustrated by the church's inaction and by its confidentiality provisions, which he said prevented him from sharing the information with others, Mr. Bowen resigned as an elder in December 2000. A year later, he started a group to monitor child sexual abuse in the church.

"Last month, Mr. Bowen, 44, was excommunicated from the church. Behind a locked door, with plastic bags taped over the windows to ward off onlookers, he said, three church elders meeting at the church's Kingdom Hall in Draffenville, Ky., found him guilty of 'causing division.'

"The punishment as 'disfellowshipping.' - complete shunning.

"In the past three months, four other people have been expelled from the Jehovah's Witnesses after accusing it of covering up the sexual abuse of children by its members. For Mr. Bowen and other critics of church policies on sexual abuse, the expulsions are part of a concerted effort to keep such abuses quiet.

"While the Roman Catholic Church has been engulfed in its own sexual abuse scandal, the same issue is beginning to plague the Jehovah's Witnesses, a denomination that claims one million members in the United States and six million worldwide.

The above is only a small part of the article about the errors of the Jehovah's Witnesses. A number of instances are given in which the reports of sexual abuse were completely ignored by the authorities of the Jehovah's Witness cult. They, like the Catholics, have been engaged in covering

up this evil.

Over the years I've had discussions with a number of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is almost always the case that when I began to ask them questions, which they can't answer, that they will "have to go," because friends are waiting for them, or some other excuse. I've had them to get outright angry when confronted with questions for which they had no answer. I have had them make promises on a number of occasions that they would "come back" or have someone else "come" and answer my unanswered questions. But I'm still waiting, and it goes back a number of years!

I do believe that we, as members of the church, should be prepared to meet the people of this cult in a discussion when they come to our door. From my personal experience I know that it is not difficult to put them into a quandary. When they get off their "track" they usually don't know what to do. If we would confront them with questions they can't answer, it might cause some to realize that they are following a false system. In most instances when they come to your door, there will be one member of some time and a trainee. If the trainee realizes that their leader cannot answer fair questions, it just might cause them to think.

With regard to the increasing number of mini-cults within the church, brethren we need to stand up and confront such error. To "contend" for the faith carries the idea off fighting for it. We must not be afraid! These brethren who are blindingly following some man, will have to give an account to the Lord, not their leader (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10:).

- - *Editor*

A Sincere Word of Thanks

We find it difficult to find words to adequately express our sincere thanks to our brethren who encourage us so greatly by their support of our work, and the positive comments about *Banner of*

Truth. Without you we would not be able to carry on our efforts in behalf of the cause of Christ. As *fellowhelpers* you have a part in sending the message out to thousands in this and several foreign countries. May the Lord richly bless us as we work together. - - *Editor*

READERS' RESPONSE

Our Readers' Response will be continued in the next issue. We greatly appreciate those who take the time to write. The invitation is also open to those who disagree with us as well as those who view our work positively. We receive many responses which we do not print. That is not because they are negative, we print both kinds, but rather that some times space doesn't work out in accordance with the other material we choose to carry

We welcome suggestions from our readers as to how we can improve the paper. We do ask that when sending names to be added to our mailing list that only the names of those you feel rather certain would read BOT, be sent. We are for this issue of BOT, for the first time, printing well over 6,000.

**Third Annual
Banner of Truth
Lectures, June 23-26**

Reservations have been confirmed for the above date. We are optimistic that the next lectures will be an improvement over the first two, even though they were outstanding from the standpoint of lessons delivered.

We are counting on those who have attended the lectures to go all out in helping us to improve. In our local area and in easy driving distance, there is a great need for standing up the true Gospel, as well as all across our country.

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