



Seek The Old Paths

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

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LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

Johnny O. Trail

In February of 2005, my parents were both diagnosed with terminal illnesses. My father was on the sixth floor of the Hospital and my mother was on the fourth floor. I was not prepared to hear what the doctor had to say about their situation. My father was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and my mother was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor. According to the neurologist, her cancer (GBM) was one of the most aggressive, fastest acting forms of cancer known to man. At this point, my mother was given six months to live and my father was given about two years. In reality, my mother lived for ten months and my father for nine. They died within thirty-seven days of one another.

In one calendar year, I lost ten close relatives including two parents, a grandmother, as well as numerous aunts and uncles. Even though I was a God-fearing Christian who had developed a sophisticated view of the afterlife and death based upon the Word of God, I was woefully un-equipped to deal with the traumatic grief that came upon me.

The grief experienced was accompanied by feelings of guilt, anxiety, and doubt. I would always wonder if the right decisions regarding the care of my parents had been made. Sadly, I had to sign a DNR (do not resuscitate) order for both parents within a one week period. I have always wondered if I could have done more for them in making end of life decisions.

Dealing with grief was not the type of material that was typically

discussed in sermon or Bible school settings. In the preaching profession, death is most often mentioned in connection with the need for salvation, but very little is offered in regards to coping with the feelings that emerge from losing someone who was loved and highly admired. At best, one might be given instruction about conducting a funeral or the preparation of a funeral sermon.

As people who are spiritually minded, church members tend to look to the preacher as a person who will have answers about life's problems. The simple fact of the matter was that I had little understanding of how to cope with the death of so many immediate family members in a one year period of time. As a matter of fact, I was so deeply impacted by the loss of my parents that I wrote a dissertation over grief and loss. When I was tasked with defending my research I remarked, "I did not just write this material — I lived it." Indeed, here are a few scholarly and personal reflections about grief recovery.

People who have lost a loved one want to talk about the one who is dead. In our own wisdom, we have sometimes avoided the topic of a dead relative, because we want to sidestep hurting the one who is dealing with grief. Just because they are dead does not mean they are not in our thoughts and in our hearts regularly. The person who is grieving a dead loved one *wants* to remember them and talk about them with others.

People who are coping with the

death of a relative or close friend are still in a relationship with that person. Their absence does not constitute deleted memories. The love we feel for the dead is not wasted or overlooked by God. Jesus wept (John 11:35) after observing the expressions of love and bereavement that occurred at the death of Lazarus.

People who are experiencing grief need to understand their grief is an expression of love. It would not be healthy or normal for one to not feel something for a close relative or friend who has died. This type of observation was made about Christ upon the death of Lazarus. John 11:36 says, "Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!" The magnitude of our grief is a direct corollary to the depth of love we feel for the deceased.

People who are experiencing grief should realize that grief is not a "one size fits all" proposition. That is, people grieve in different ways. This is exemplified by various passages of Scripture. David refused to eat until after his son died (2 Samuel 12:22-23). Martha ran out to meet Jesus while Mary remained in her house (John 11:20). All people experience grief in different and unique sorts of ways.

Those going through bereavement need to know that there is no expiration date to their grief. In doing grief therapy some have asked me, "How long will I feel this way?" My answer offers little comfort, but solid truth. There is no set time limit to your feel-

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Loss and Bereavement...



Editorial...

IF WE LOVE THE LORD THEN...

Garland M. Robinson

We are his **FRIENDS**. In John 15:14 Jesus said, “*Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you.*” Scores of people claim to be friends of Jesus but they are not obeying his word — at least not all of it. They pick and choose and only obey the parts they like. You can’t be a friend of the Lord and only do part of what he said. There are millions and millions of people in the world that we can confidently say ‘they are no friend of Jesus’ because it is evident they do not obey His word. Sadly, there’s a lot of “our” preachers today about whom we can say “they are not friends of Jesus” because they refuse to preach the whole counsel of God and/or they preach error and/or they fellowship with denominations. They are compromising the truth of the Gospel!

We are **BRETHREN**. We’re in the family of God, united by the common bond of affection. Second Peter 1:1 says we are brethren “of like precious faith.” The New Testament repeatedly speaks of fellow Christians as “brethren.” Acts 11:1, “And the apostles and *brethren* that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.” Acts 11:29, “Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the *brethren* which dwelt in Judaea.” Acts 15:3, “And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the *brethren.*” Acts 21:17, “And when we were come to Jerusalem, the *brethren* received us gladly.”

We are **SAINTS**. Romans 1:7, “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called [to be] *saints*: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 16:15, “Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the *saints* which are with them.”

1 Corinthians 1:2, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are *sanctified* in Christ Jesus, called [to be] *saints*...” 1 Corinthians 14:33, “For God is not [the author] of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the *saints.*” 2 Corinthians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the *saints* which are in all Achaia.” 2 Corinthians 13:13, “All the *saints* salute you.” Ephesians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the *saints* which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:19, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the *saints*, and of the household of God.” Colossians 1:2, “To the *saints* and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Men have perverted the Bible’s teaching that all Christians are saints. They seek to venerate only certain individuals who meet their man-made set of criteria, totally perverting the standard (word) of the God.

We are **FAITHFUL**. 1 Corinthians 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful.*” 1 Corinthians 4:17, “For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and *faithful* in the Lord...” Ephesians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the *saints* which are at Ephesus, and to the *faithful* in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 6:21, “...Tychicus, a beloved brother and *faithful* minister in the Lord...” Colossians 1:2, “To the *saints* and *faithful brethren* in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Colossians 4:9, “With Onesimus, a *faithful* and beloved brother, who is [one] of you.”

Third John 1:5, “Beloved, thou doest *faithfully* whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers.” Revelation 2:10, “...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

We are **EVANGELISTIC**. Matthew 28:19-20, “Go ye therefore, and *teach all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.” Mark 16:15-16, “And he said unto them, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Luke 14:23, “And the lord said unto the servant, *Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel [them] to come in, that my house may be filled.*” John 3:5, “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*” Acts 8:4, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad *went every where preaching the word.*”

We **CONTENT FOR THE FAITH**. Jude 1:3, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort [you] that *ye should earnestly contend for the faith* which was once delivered unto the *saints.*” Philippians 1:7, “Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in *the defence and confirmation of the gospel*, ye all are partakers of my grace.” Philippians 1:17, “But the other of love, knowing that *I am set for the defence of the gospel.*”

We **MARK AND FOLLOW**. The word “mark” means to observe, look toward, pay attention to, etc. It is used in both a good and bad context. For example, there are some we observe and look toward that we might imitate their good example, while others we look toward that we may avoid them and not follow their example. The idea to “mark and follow” is pointing to the fact that we look at others and seek to imitate them in regards to their good example. For instance, in Philippians 3:17 we read, “Brethren, *be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for*

an ensample.” Jesus said, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). First Timothy 4:12, “Let no man despise thy youth; but *be thou an example of the believers*, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” James 5:10, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, *for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.*” 1 Peter 2:21, “For even hereunto were ye called: because *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*”

We **MARK AND AVOID**. Romans 16:17-18, “Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Matthew 7:15, “*Beware of false prophets*, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Luke 17:1, “Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but *woe [unto him], through whom they come!*” Galatians 2:4-5, “And that because of *false brethren unawares brought in*, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom *we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour*; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” Colossians 2:8, “*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit*, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

We **SUPPORT and UPHOLD the TRUTH, the GOSPEL**. Paul said, “*Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*” (Gal. 4:16)? He also told Timothy, and by extension all of us, “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2). “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

There are many great examples in the Bible to follow. People who

loved the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. We would do well to study, learn and imitate the good characteristics of men and women such as:

- Noah (found grace in the sight of the Lord, Gen. 6:8)
- Abraham (the father of us all, Rom. 4:16)
- David (a man after God’s own heart, 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22)
- Paul (great defender of the faith, Phil. 1:7,17)
- Barnabas (son of consolation, Acts 4:36)
- Dorcas (worker of alms deeds, Acts 9:36-39)
- Onesimus (a faithful and beloved brother, Col. 4:9)

There are also so many bad examples whom we must avoid at all costs:

- Pharaoh (refused to obey God, Exodus 5:2)
- Jannes and Jambres (withstood Moses, 2 Tim. 3:8)
- Balaam (taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, Numbers 22-24; Rev. 2:14).
- Jeroboam (caused Israel to sin, 1 Kings 14:16)
- Judas (betrayed the Lord, Luke 22:48)
- A Rich young ruler (walked away from the Lord, Luke 16)
- Alexander the coppersmith (did much evil, 2 Tim. 4:14)
- Diotrephes (loved the preeminence, 3 John 9)

Loss and Bereavement...

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ings. I know this from personal experience. My parents shall have been dead for twelve years, and there are times (not as many now) when the grief and pain are just as real as the day they died. I can still hear songs that were played at my parents’ funerals and break down in tears. This is, in my estimation, normal. We were not created as cold, unfeeling beings, but in the image of a loving, compassionate God.

Those going through bereavement need to know that God understands death and loss. Jehovah God experienced the death of His own Son (Heb. 4:15). By virtue of that fact, we can know that He relates to us in our grief. Jehovah is not a cold, impersonal God. If the very hairs of our heads are numbered (Luke 12:7), God certainly knows when our hearts are broken.

Those going through bereavement need to understand that grief, anger, and depression are not indicative of faithlessness. The godly will suffer and feel all of the aforementioned emotions. When one reads the entire book of Job it becomes evident that Job endured the entire gamut of human emotions in his grief and loss.

Those who are suffering with the death of a loved one need to under-

stand that it is okay to ask “why?” By implication, Christians are asking God why this has happened to them. Job asked this question. Job 3:11-12 says, “**Why** died I not from the womb? **why** did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? **Why** did the knees prevent me? or **why** the breasts that I should suck?” Unlike one who believes in God, the unbeliever has no one to ask and no way of putting his feelings into perspective.

Instead of going through “stages” of grief, we really go through “waves” of grief. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross famously wrote about the stages of grief (denial, bargaining, acceptance, etc).¹ In reality, one can feel any of those emotions at any point in the grief process, and Kubler-Ross acknowledged this toward the end of her life.

As God’s people, we need to reach out to those experiencing grief and loss (Gal. 6:10). The above treatise merely begins to touch the garment of a whole discipline of study regarding death and loss. When we share our grief experiences, we enable others to experience a degree of comfort in mediating their bereavement.

ENDNOTE: ‘Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth and Kessler, David (2005). *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York, Schribner.

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Elder's COLUMN

A GLIMPSE OF THE EARLY CHURCH ACTS 2:42-47

Roger D. Campbell

In fulfillment of His promise (Matt. 16:18), our Lord established His church in the city of Jerusalem on the first Day of Pentecost after He rose from the dead. There had never been a day like it in human history. On that day about 3,000 people accepted the Gospel message and were saved from their sins when they repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-41). What an exciting start for the kingdom of God!

What happened after those initial baptisms? What did the new converts do? In the last six verses of Acts 2, we get a glimpse of some of the things that were going on in the early church. Here is what is recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

1) *The early disciples continued.* They continued steadfastly (Acts 2:42). They were constantly diligent. They were persevering. Being baptized into the Christ brings an end to the old life outside of Christ, but it is only the beginning of the new life in and with Him. Every member of the church should be ready to continue steadfastly in the way of the Lord. In what did the early saints continue in a steadfast manner? In the apostles'

teaching, in fellowship, in the breaking of the bread (the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:20), and in prayers. It is obvious the early disciples did not simply have their names on a membership role. They were personally involved in the Lord's Cause and work.

2) *The church (disciples) was reverent.* Fear came on every soul (2:43) in the early days of the church. They served God "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:29). That is what God expects of each of us.

3) *The brethren (church) were united,* as the members were together, and had all things in common (2:44). We later read that they were "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). Such unity is both powerful and priceless.

4) *The early church was blessed with generous members.* How did they demonstrate their generosity? They sold their possessions and shared them with those that needed them (2:45). Many continued to display a spirit of generosity, selling their possessions and turning over the proceeds to the apostles so that those who were lacking physical necessities might be aided (4:34-35).

5) *First-century members of the church spent time with other Christians in public assemblies,* but they also gathered in social settings outside of those worship assemblies. They ate meals together and were glad to be able to associate with one another (2:46). Congregations in which members do not enjoy being together and rarely spend time together in more relaxed, social meetings, often struggle to have and maintain an atmosphere that "feels like a real family." A careful reading reveals that those early saints were spending time together on a daily basis (2:46). What a blessing!

6) *The saints were happy people* in the early days of the church in Jerusalem. They ate food with gladness and simplicity of heart (2:46). Why shouldn't members of the Lord's body be happy?! We have a Savior in which to rejoice. We are forgiven of

past transgressions, blessed immensely in the present, and have a matchless hope of great things to come in the future.

7) *We also see those new-in-the-faith disciples praising God* (2:47). Praising the Creator never becomes boring or "gets old" for those that are in love with the Christ and appreciate all that He has done for mankind. "Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15).

8) *It is obvious that the early church was a teaching church.* On a daily basis the Lord was adding saved people to his church (2:47). People are saved when they believe and obey the Gospel. That can only happen after people have been taught the good news (Rom. 10:13-17). So, since conversions were taking place every day, we conclude that the early church was actively spreading the word. Do we match their zeal today?

When we read those last few verses of Acts 2, we may find ourselves silently nodding in approval of all the good things that were going on. It is not enough, though, just to make a list of what the early church did. Let us learn from the early saints and strive to put into practice what they did so well.

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Jesus was very clear about **Love, Commandments** and **Obedience**. John 14:15,21,23 "If ye love me, keep my commandments. ... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. ... If a man love me, he will keep my words... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." John 8:31-32, "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, IF ye continue in my word, THEN are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

SHALL WE “PUT CHRIST BACK IN CHRISTMAS?”

Ivie Powell

Every year about this time we hear the slogan, “Put Christ back in Christmas.” This same slogan will appear on various advertisements. Even some uninformed members of the church will echo the same sentiment. Well, the truth is, it is impossible to “Put Christ back in Christmas,” since He has never been in Christmas! One will search the Scriptures in vain in an attempt to find December 25 as the birth date of Christ or any other date as far as that is concerned! Scriptures nowhere assigns the exact date of our Lord’s birth. The Encyclopedia Britannica (Vol.5, p.641) states: “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church, and before the 5th century there was no general consensus of opinion as to when it should come in the calendar, whether on January 6, March 25, or December 25.”

Observe also that the Bible gives no instructions as to HOW to celebrate Christ’s birth, even if the date were known! Now, if someone says, “The three wise men conferred gifts on His birthday and this is our example to follow. First, it cannot be proved that there were three wise men. Yes, three gifts (gold, frankincense, myrrh), but the number of men is not mentioned. As far as that goes, one man could have brought more than one gift. Second, one must prove that the wise men came the day of Christ’s birth. It is purely fictional that the wise men came to the manger as most “Christmas scenes” are presented. Jesus was born in a stable (Luke 2:1-7), but Mary, Joseph and Jesus were in a house when the wise men visited them (Matt. 2:11).

It is often stated, even by some brethren, “Well, what you say is true, but what is wrong with setting aside December 25 as the birth date of Christ?” The wrong is in establishing a religious observance without divine approval! Take note of the following passage of Scripture: “*And whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*” (Col. 3:17). Question: Where is the biblical authority for setting aside any date to observe the birth date of Christ?

Furthermore, the Bible condemns the setting aside of special days in the following passage: “*Ye observe days, and months, and times, I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain*” (Gal. 4:10-11). The only day Christians are to observe with God’s approval is the first day of the week. At which time we remember the Lord’s death (1 Cor. 11:23-30; Acts 20:7).

While we are discussing the subject of: “Putting Christ back in Christmas,” it is really amazing the number of people (including brethren) who will make their “annual pilgrimage” to the meeting house on so-called “Christmas Sunday” and yes, “Easter Sunday,” but any other time seldom assemble with the saints! Not only that, many will spend more on gifts during this season than they give to God all year! Could it be that many will allow “San-

ta” to rob God of their obligation to give as they have been prospered?! The Lord did not say to give as one has prospered (1 Cor.16:1-2) only on “Christmas” and/or “Easter!”

How then, if at all, should Christians celebrate December 25? The same as they do Labor Day or Memorial Day — as just another holiday without any religious attachment! To observe this time of the year as purely social is left to the discretion of the individual. Let us always remember it is through Christ’s death, burial and resurrection that true blessings have come!

Shall we “Put Christ back in Christmas?” How can this be done, since Christ was never in Christmas!

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THE LORD’S SUPPER

Jesus our Savior suffered and died on the cross of Calvary for the sins of the whole world (2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 5:6-8; Luke 23:33; 19:10; 1 Tim. 2:15). To remember this great event Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). Christians would begin to eat the Lord’s Supper when the kingdom/church came (Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:18). This great event occurred on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem when the church began (Acts 2:1-47). They began to eat the Lord’s Supper that day and continued to do so in the future (Acts 2:42; 20:7).

What does the “bread” and “fruit of the vine” mean to Christians (Luke 22:18,19)? The unleavened bread was to bring to their memory the crucified body of Christ (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The fruit of the vine was to memorialize his blood shed on the cross (Luke 2:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). This great memorial is to be taken on the first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7). We are told in Colossians 3:17, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*” Since Jesus has directed us through his word to eat the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine to remember him on the first day of the week, it would be a sin to eat anything else or to observe it on another day.

When we do something that is not authorized by Jesus, we sin (2 John 9; Rev. 22:18). When we teach something more or different than we find in the New Testament, we stand condemned. “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*” (Gal. 1:8,9). We should ask “by whose authority” some congregations eat the Lord’s Supper on a day not authorized by God or eat it only monthly, quarterly or annually.

It is a sin to worship according to doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7-9).

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RELIGION WITHOUT RULES?

Brandon Baggett

My wife and I were flying out of Forth Worth, TX to a lecture-ship in Lubbock. While the plane was boarding, we overheard an interesting conversation from two passengers seated behind. One of the men was a business man traveling to Lubbock for a few days of business. The other was a traveling guest speaker for a denominational church in Lubbock who was to speak the fol-

lowing day. These two men were having a conversation about God and religion. The business man continually voiced his disdain with “organized religion,” and the preacher agreed. The thrust of their discourse centered on the idea that Christianity is about religion instead of rules. The idea presented was that the Bible is a book of good principles, but it is not to be understood as a book of rules to be fol-

lowed. As long as a person is sincere, honest, and seeking a relationship with God, they will be saved. God wants man to have a relationship with Him, and the details really do not matter.

This conversation disturbed me. The sentiments I overheard are not new. In fact, man has always looked upon the commandments of God with disdain, desiring to be free from di-

CHANGE IS THE BATTLECRY

Change is the battle cry of those who are determined to restructure the Lord’s church into just one more religious group in a sea of confusion and diversity. To be sure, not all change is bad. But the kind of change we address here is change that will diametrically altar the Lord’s church as we know it. Compromise is not the answer, nor is a radical restructuring the panacea to our problems.

Some years ago I came across this interesting piece from Dr. Wayne Dehoney, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention: “A closer look at the churches of Christ would hardly reveal that their brand of religion is on the downgrade! This fast-growing group is one of the most potent missionary and evangelistic forces in the country. Their congregations are flourishing, and new churches are continually being established. A profile of faith and practice contradicts practically every ‘solid conclusion’ by the authorities of the main-line denominational establishments about the renewal the church must experience to ‘survive.’ The churches of Christ are anti-ecumenical in their relationships; conservative in their theology; autonomous and democratic in their congregational structure; they make rigid moral and ethical demands on their members in such matters as social drinking; they are not ‘social action’ oriented; they have a ‘messianic complex’ of being the true people of God and the true church! All of these factors combine to give them a high motivation, an unquenchable zeal, and an inescapable compulsion to win the world to an acceptance of their convictions and beliefs. And they are growing rapidly.”

What I find curious about the cries for change is the fact that the kind of change some are demanding will destroy our distinctiveness, the very characteristic that has brought growth to the Lord’s church through the years. Why is it that some of our “learned” brethren want to compromise the truth, soften our positions on doctrinal matters, and apologize for our exclusiveness? Paul told us that he was “not ashamed of the Gospel; for it is the power unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Is it possible that some of our brethren are ashamed of that Gospel, and who now want to change the face of the church so as not to offend others? To ask is to answer.

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vine law. In Psalm 2, the inspired writer spoke of some who despised God's law and said, "let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:3). They did not want to be bound by the mandates of God. Instead, they wanted to be free to direct their own course and be their own ruler. Many today have the same attitude towards the laws of God. They want to have a relationship without rules. Sure, it seems appealing to think of being right with God without having to submit to God. It seems appealing to think a person can have a relationship with God purely on the basis of sincerity without having to live by a certain code of conduct, but the Scriptures know of no such religion.

True, Christianity is not to be viewed as a list of "Do's" and "Don'ts." Far too many in the pew view serving the Lord as a burden. While they yield to the commands of God, they do it solely out of duty instead of devotion. Their obedience is robotic and mechanical, and it is void of a heart of love. Christianity is to originate from the heart. Jesus even said the greatest commandment in the Law of Moses was to love God supremely (Matt. 22:37-40; cf. Deut. 6:5). Love is deemed "the first and greatest commandment" because it is the very motive from which mature service to God should flow. Our obedience to the laws and commandments of God should stem from our deep devotion to Him and desire to please Him as children. Christianity should not be a mere checklist of duties to dispatch and be done with. Such an attitude is neither true obedience nor a healthy relationship with God.

While Christianity is not a checklist religion, it is also not a religion free from divine law and commandment keeping. Sincerity alone will not enable one to intimately know the Creator of Heaven and Earth. A relationship to God necessitates submitting to His revealed will. The Scriptures are replete with references showing the undeniable connection between obedience and man's relationship with God. Using the terms "rules" and "relationship" as used by the men on the plane, notice some passages of Scripture:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord [RELATIONSHIP], shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but

LEAN NOT TO YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING

Do not trust man's knowledge to guide you, whether your own or the collective knowledge of man. Philosophy and the sciences of man cannot provide the direction you need. Allow God and His word to guide your ways. His word will always guide you in the right direction. Trust in God with everything that is within you. Right and wrong is determined by God, and is revealed in His word. Will you allow God to direct you through His word, or will you listen to the ways of the world?

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

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he that doeth the will [RULES] of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

"Who is my mother, or my brethren [RELATIONSHIP]? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren [RELATIONSHIP]! For whosoever shall do the will of God [RULES], the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother [RELATIONSHIP]" (Mark 3:33-35).

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord [RELATIONSHIP], and do not the things which I say [RULES]" (Luke 6:46)?

"If ye keep my commandments [RULES], ye shall abide in my love [RELATIONSHIP]; even as I have kept my Father's commandments [RULES], and abide in his love [RELATIONSHIP]" (John 15:10).

"Ye are my friends [RELATIONSHIP], if ye do whatsoever I command you [RULES]" (John 15:14).

"And hereby we do know that we know him [RELATIONSHIP], if we keep his commandments [RULES]. He that saith, I know him [RELATIONSHIP], and keepeth not his commandments [RULES], is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word [RULES], in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him [RELATIONSHIP]. He that saith he abideth in him [RELATIONSHIP] ought himself also so to walk [RULES], even as he walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

These passages constitute a mere

sampling of texts which give us insight into the relationship between following the commandments of God and having an intimate connection to Him. Christianity is not a cold checklist of rules, but it is also not an empty relationship without submission to the voice of God. If we want to obtain and maintain a blessed relationship with God, we must lovingly and wholly yield our will to His. Religion without rules is simply paganism.

May our obedience to God be true, our love for God be deep, and our relationship with Him be unbroken.

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WORSHIP involves:

SINGING: Eph. 5:19, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart."

PRAYING: Acts 12:5, "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church."

LORD'S SUPPER: Acts 20:7, "The first day of the week...the disciples came together to break bread."

PREACHING: I Cor. 1:18,21, "Preaching of the cross...It pleased God by... preaching to save them that believe."

GIVING: I Cor. 16:2, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him."



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