

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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CONFRONTING ISLAM: EXAMINING THE QUR'AN

Wayne Jackson

Should we avoid exposing the errors in the Qur'an to spare the feelings of our Moslem friends?

An article appeared in July, 1997 edition of **The Christian Chronicle** under the title, "The Islamic World." The author, managing editor Glover Shipp, suggested that "Churches of Christ are at the amateur level in communication with and converting Muslims..."

Citing Wesley Jones, who is reputed to have a better insight into this matter than most of us, brother Shipp lists some principles which he feels will help us in reaching out to the Moslem community. Some of these suggestions are useful, but one of them is puzzling.

"Know the Qur'an, but don't attack it. As there are slanderous opinions circulated about the Bible, so there are about the Qur'an. Intellectual honesty forbids that we repeat these. And obviously, attacking the Muslim Holy Book itself closes minds" (p.17).

A RESPONSE

We believe that several things need to be said in response to this statement.

First, there are common-sense guidelines in the New Testament that will enable the devout Christian to know how to approach potential converts of any religion within a variety of international backgrounds.

Granted those who have lived among certain peoples may have some keener insights into the cultural peculiarities of a country. These matters, however, are not the paramount aspect of seeking the lost. In the first century there was simply a compassionate proclamation of the pure gospel, brought to bear upon honest hearts; this produced an explosive growth of the kingdom of Christ.

Second, no lover of souls possessing "intellectual honesty," has any desire whatever to misrepresent the teachings of the Moslem Qur'an, by appealing to unfounded "slanderous opinions" regarding Islam's "sacred" book. Nothing is ever gained by misrepresenting an opponent, or in exhibiting a mean-spirited attitude. However, it would have been helpful if the author had cited a few examples of this unscrupulous methodology so that such tactics might be avoided.

Third, the suggestion that we should adopt a "hands off" policy with reference to Islam's "holy" book is strange indeed. How could one possibly hope to convert those of the Islamic persuasion without demonstrating the fact that the Qur'an is not a sacred work?

The word "attack" is very loaded, of course, but the bottom line is this. If Moslems claim that the Qur'an is a divine production, and yet it is not, then this book represents a perversion of truth. No Moslem will ever be

led to the Lord until he renounces this fraudulent document and acknowledges the Bible as his solitary source of divine guidance. The fact of the matter is, there is great value in showing that the Qur'an is not supported by the sort of evidence that would be characteristic of an inspired production.

Moslems sincerely believe that the Qur'an is a divine book. It is styled "The Holy Qur'an." This volume consists of 114 sections called Suras, each of which is divided into verses. Each Sura (except 9) begins with: "In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful."

It is alleged that the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed verbatim by the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years (but compiled after his death). One passage asserts: "Praise be to God, Who hath sent to His Servant [Mohammed] The Book [the Qur'an], and hath allowed Therein no Crookedness" (18:1).

IS THE QUR'AN FROM GOD?

Inasmuch as the Qur'an declares itself to be a revelation from God, we have every right to examine this claim. If the book does not meet the standard that one has a right to expect from a document that claims to be from Heaven, it must be reject-

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Confronting Islam...



Guest Editorial

MATTERS OF FAITH AND OPINION

James W. Boyd

Our lesson deals with authority. An understanding of this subject is important because it affects unity, and the effectiveness of the church at work. Misunderstanding has created problems, divisions and apostasy. Psalm 133:1, “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” That which disrupts unity is a serious matter for those who love the Lord. The only way to have genuine unity is to have an understanding of the truth and follow it.

What do we mean by matters of faith and opinion? Matters of faith are those things imposed upon us because God has spoken concerning them. Matters of faith are those revelations in His Word that make up the faith or religion of Jesus Christ.

THE FAITH

Jude three speaks of “the faith” once delivered to the saints. Matters of faith are those points that are embodied in that faith, that exist by the Lord’s authority and direction, that are to be believed and practiced because they are revealed by God. Matters of faith are those truths that come to us by the Word (Rom. 10:17).

For instance, the Bible reveals the terms of entrance into the company of the saved, the church, to be *faith* (Heb. 11:6), *repentance* (Acts 2:38), *confession of faith* (Acts 8:37), and *baptism* into Christ (Rom. 6:3-6). These are matters of “thus saith the Lord.” The Bible reveals the avenues of worship to be *singing* (Eph. 5:19), *praying* (Acts 12:5), the *Lord’s Supper* (Acts 20:7), *giving* (I Cor. 16:2), and *proclaiming His Word* (Acts 20:7). We cannot add to nor take from what God has said. There is no room for deviation from them (Gal. 1:6-9; II John 9-11; Rev. 21:18-19; I Peter 4:11; Col. 3:17). They cannot be violated without sinning against God’s authority.

OPINION

Matters of opinion are matters that demand and allow the exercise of human judgment. There are matters commanded and authorized of God (matters of faith) for which specific directions as to how to carry out these things are not given in every detail. The details have to be supplied nonetheless, and are supplied by human judgment. When God gives a command or direction, and tells *how* it is to be expedited, then the command and the way of carrying out that command are matters of faith. But when God has given command, direction, or permission for something without giving details as to how it is to be expedited, the command must be obeyed, but man must use his judgment to supply the details that God has not specified. Opinions are involved, and human opinions are not infallible and are subject to question and variation. We are to be charitable toward one another respecting matters of opinion.

For instance, we are commanded to *go and preach the Gospel*. We are told to preach, and what to preach. These are matters of faith. But we are not told *how to go*. We must use our judgment. We may go in whatever way seems the most expedient, whether we walk, run, ride, fly, float, etc. One may prefer to walk, and another prefer to fly. It is a matter of opinion and we must allow each one to exercise his own judgment or opinion.

We are commanded to *teach*, but the method of teaching is not specified. We may use chalk boards, radio, television, tracts, etc. When we teach we may use the lecture method, question and answer method, whatever one thinks best for the situation. It is a matter of opinion.

We are told to *baptize* and this is a matter of faith. God has spoken.

But *where* we baptize is not specified and that is a matter of judgment so long as we have an ample supply of water to immerse. That is a matter of opinion.

The use of such judgment can not and must not alter the thing commanded — neither take from it or add to it. We are to carry out what is commanded. There is no right or wrong way of doing it when God has not directed which way, and the way we choose does not violate His will in any other way. Some ways may be better than others. But which way one chooses is a matter of opinion.

WHOSE OPINION?

In matters of congregational efforts, someone must decide which opinion will prevail. Obviously, everybody cannot do everything “his way” because there may be several ways of accomplishing something. Those with the responsibility and authority to decide in matters of opinion for the congregation are the elders of the church. They have the oversight and are the overseers (I Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). Their decisions are to be obeyed and respected by the members (Heb. 13:17). They decide only in matters of opinion, not matters of faith, because the Word has already been revealed concerning matters of faith. In matters of opinion, there must be charity and consideration one of another.

CASES IN POINT

To illustrate further, consider the FINANCING of the work of the church. First Corinthians 16:1-2 and Second Corinthians 9:6-7 teach we are to give — a free-will offering, as we have been prospered, as we have purposed, cheerfully and liberally. There is no authority for fund raising through raffles, pie suppers, carnivals, rummage sales, business ventures, etc. But as to *how* the collections may be gathered, there is room and need for human judgment. Some may wish to “pass the plate by the people.” It would be just as acceptable with God to “pass the people by the plate,” though possibly not as expedient. This decision requires judgment.

Consider the MUSIC in worship. God has spoken, and in every pas-

sage, He says *sing*. He did not say to just “make music” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). For this reason we reject so-called translations that include the words “make music” which God never said. No man has the right to introduce another *kind of music* that does not have God’s authority. Playing instruments produces another kind of music that is not authorized and therefore wrong. But whether we use song books, have two or four songs, sing four part harmony or all sing the melody, are matters of judgment and opinion. On these matters God has not spoken, although the command to sing must be expedited some way.

Regarding the WORK with which the church is charged, we are to *preach the Gospel* to the lost (to save the lost), *edify the saved* (to preserve the saved and/or recover the fallen), and *render benevolent aid* to those who are in need as we have opportunity. For each of these areas of work we have a “thus saith the Lord.” These are matters of faith as to what the church can and cannot do with God’s authority. Unless an activity is authorized, it cannot be lawfully expedited in any way. No man, board, or any group has the right to saddle upon the church secular education, entertainment, and such things as building gymnasiums for fun and games. No man can arrange some unauthorized organization to do the work of the church. The government of the church is sufficient to do the work the Lord has given the church to do. It is not the work of the church to be involved in secular schools, politics, athletic games, nor to usurp the role of the home or the civil government.

DECISIONS MUST HE MADE

Doing the work of evangelism, edification, and benevolence, requires many human decisions because every detail in doing that work is not revealed in Scripture. Who shall we send into the mission field? Where shall we send them? How much is adequate support? What equipment is needed? Shall we conduct classes? Where shall we assemble? Who is to teach at what time? How do we care for the needy such as orphans, widows, the destitute, etc.? All these things are

required in doing the work, but the *manner* of doing it is not a matter of faith, it is a matter of opinion. Somebody decides.

As for carrying for the homeless, the church is not designed to be the home. It cannot be the home. There are no elders over a home. But the church provides for the homeless by providing a home. How these provisions are to be supplied falls into the realm of the unrevealed but necessary judgments.

A VERY CLEAR EXAMPLE

One other illustration makes the distinction between matters of faith and opinion very clear. Hebrews 10:25, I Corinthians 11:20, Acts 20:7 all teach the command to assemble on the first day of the week. No man can set that aside without violating God’s will. But still there are matters of judgment that must be determined. Where shall we meet? At what hour on the first day of the week do we meet? How long shall we assemble together? All these things are matters of human opinion.

To ignore these principles of faith and opinion is to ignore the difference between the Lord’s church and denominationalism. It is to invite confusion, strife, and division. Departure from these principles has brought havoc to the church too many times — from liberals as well as those who would bind human laws. Those who ignore God’s authority by loosing what God has bound, or binding what God has loosed, create problems for God’s people. We have no right to dismiss any matter of faith. We have no right to make any matter of opinion a matter of faith.

History shows how disrespect for this distinction has created barriers between both individuals and congregations, and has retarded the cause of Christ. The denominational world is often guilty of disregarding matters of faith. Brethren have also been guilty of confusing matters of faith and opinion. We need to recognize the difference, abide in His authority, have authority for all that we do (Col. 3:17), bind what God has bound, and loose what God looses.

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CHURCH BULLETINS

Roger D. Campbell

Many congregations of God's people publish a weekly bulletin. Some may wonder why a local church even bothers with such an item. After all, it does require time and work to prepare a bulletin. Bulletins do not produce themselves, so it takes effort on someone's part to get them done. And, the paper and ink used to print them are not cheap. Besides, if you have ever noticed, some of them just get thrown down on the floor. Maybe you have even seen that in some cases, kids turn bulletins into drawing paper or a coloring book. Oh yes, we are aware of all of these truths. Still, we are convinced that church bulletins have the potential to be a great aid in the Lord's work.

Church bulletins come in different sizes, colors, and formats, but basically they all have one thing in common: church bulletins are used as a means of communication. First, they are a tool by which a local church teaches the Bible. The teaching of the Bible via bulletins is one way of carrying out the Lord's charge to preach the Gospel to every person (Mark 16:15). At the same time, the teaching done in bulletin articles and other Bible-based materials is a means of edifying or building up the church (Rom. 14:19).

A second major function of bulletins is to provide information to the congregation. If we are to see to the needs of the sick or those with special material or physical needs (Matt. 25:35,36), then we need to be aware of those needs and opportunities. Providing such information in bulletins is helpful in getting the word out to all the members of a congregation. Announcements relative to upcoming events of a local church are often printed in bulletins. This helps the members arrange their plans in order to be able to support the activities of the church. We know we are to rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep (Rom. 12:15), showing support for both those members of the body that suffer as well as those that are honored (I Cor. 12:26). Again, printing infor-

mation about these matters in a bulletin helps keep a congregation better informed and prepared to serve others in the body.

From "the Great Commission" and other New Testament passages, we conclude that a local church is authorized to prepare, produce, print, and pass out a church bulletin. The leaders of a local church give consideration to what type of bulletin arrangement is most expedient for a local flock of God's people. Those leaders then determine the size, format, and frequency of producing a bulletin for the needs of a local congregation. Bulletins really can be edifying, encouraging, and useful in a number of senses.

Church bulletins can also be quite revealing. What do church bulletins reveal? For one thing, many church bulletins reveal attendance tendencies. I am appalled at some of the attendance statistics that I see in the bulletins of congregations that have had a reputation of being sound in the faith. It is not uncommon for some of them to have an average Sunday morning Bible class attendance or mid-week attendance that is barely 50% of the average Sunday morning worship attendance. In many cases there are special health and other issues that affect a congregation's attendance, but 50%?! We all need to take seriously the charge to seek first the Lord's affairs (Matt. 6:33) and set our interests on spiritual matters (Col. 3:2). When God and His affairs have first place in our hearts, our attendance at the services of God's church will be a natural thing for us.

Church bulletins also reveal a local church's emphasis. What dominates the pages of a bulletin, is it social matters or spiritual matters? What is predominantly seen in a bulletin's "teaching section," is it quotes from the Bible, or quotes from "religious scholars" of our day? Is it humor, or Bible? There is a place for God's people to smile, as the Bible says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (Prov. 17:22). I have neither the desire nor the right to try

and tell a preacher or bulletin-preparer what percentage of his message may be humor-oriented. But, brethren, mark it down. A strong church is not built and maintained by humor! God's Kingdom is strengthened through strong teaching of sound doctrine. After the apostle Paul expressed his concern for the future affairs of the church in Ephesus, he told the overseers of that church, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Remember, we grow through the milk of God's word (I Peter 2:2), not funny stories.

Recently I mentioned to a brother in the Lord the name of a man that is scheduled to appear on a youth program in our fair state. The brother told me that he had heard the man speak before. His analysis was that the man in his sermon used three or four verses and filled the rest of his time with humor and stories. Brethren, where is the emphasis in our teaching from the pulpits, in the classroom, and in our bulletins? Is the emphasis on the Book, or social affairs? Is it on the Lord's word, or men's stories? God being my helper, as long as my feeble hands have a part in producing a bulletin, it will be a teaching tool that is Bible-oriented.

Some church bulletins reveal the flesh. I take no delight in saying such, but it is true. Some bulletins that I have seen in the past show women with bare mid-sections, men and women wearing swimsuits, or both sexes wearing skimpy jogging shorts that cover only about 1/3 of the upper leg. Surely there would never be such flesh on display in church bulletins? Sadly, it happens. "You must be talking about denominations and not the church of Christ." No, I am talking 100% about bulletins put out by the Lord's church. The covering of the body from shoulders to knees that God apparently provided for Adam and Eve when He clothed them in tunics (Gen. 3:21), is still a safe practice to

follow in our dress. “Modest apparel” is still in fashion with the Lord God (I Tim. 2:9). That goes for pictures in church bulletins just as much as it does for any other occasion. Some congregations now publish their bulletins on-line (they have web sites on the internet). Some web sites include pictures of activities that involve members of the congregation. Some of these on-line photos reveal the flesh just like some printed bulletins do. Again, I take no pleasure in pointing out the reality of what some congregations do and then publish in picture form in their bulletins or on the internet. I am simply pointing out the facts.

Church bulletins also reveal the fellowship tendencies of a congregation. When we announce upcoming events, activities, and programs that involve other congregations and special speakers, should we not take care to announce only those that

involve sound brethren? Surely some items fall into the realm of judgment. Yet, it is a mystery to me why some congregations seem to make little or no distinction in the things that they advertise and encourage the local saints to support. When a bulletin announces a Gospel meeting at a sound congregation, then right alongside it there is an announcement about a drama team from an apostate university in Nashville, TN (**David Lipscomb University**) coming somewhere to perform for the area teens, it is sending forth a mixed signal of uncertain sounds. Either folks do not know what is going on, they do not see error as a big deal, they just do not care, or else they are deceived into thinking that as long as an announcement says “church of Christ” on it, “then surely it can’t be too bad.” Brethren, we are not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph.

5:11). When we publish in our bulletins every announcement “under the sun” that comes our way, we are sending a message to our brethren that can potentially damage their souls. When we support the unfaithful, we become partakers of their evil deeds. The Bible says so (II John 9-11).

Church bulletins can be extremely helpful to the Lord’s Cause. I personally benefit from a number of bulletins that I receive. I thank God for them. Other bulletins that I have seen through the years have been, to say it kindly, woefully lacking when it comes to providing any true spiritual benefit. May every congregation of the Lord’s church that produces a bulletin be committed to using it for God’s glory, for the strengthening of His church, and for the eternal salvation of souls.

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Confronting Islam...

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ed as false, and its weaknesses should be exposed.

Geisler and Saleeb review eight lines of argument that are employed to demonstrate that the Qur’an is sacred. These may be summarized as follows:

1. The Qur’an’s unique literary style is such that it could have been authored only by God (10:37; 17:88).
2. Since Mohammed was an “unlettered Prophet,” he could not have produced the book himself (7:157).
3. The claim is made that the Qur’an is the only book that has been preserved in its “exact original form” (Haneef, 19).
4. The Qur’an is believed to contain prophecies that demonstrate its inspiration.
5. Its alleged unity, or lack of “discrepancy” (4:82), is supposed to argue for its divine origin.
6. The Qur’an is allegedly marked by a scientific accuracy and foreknowledge that can be explained only in terms of inspiration.
7. Supposedly the Qur’an is characterized by a mathematical precision based upon the number

nineteen.

8. It is argued that the Qur’an has changed lives, thus it must be sacred (pp. 181-203).

When these arguments are critically examined they simply do not establish the case. For example: The Qur’an does not have a profound literary style. It is characterized by numerous grammatical aberrations. Moreover, as McClintock and Strong observed, “it is exceedingly incoherent and sententious, the book evidently being without any logical order of thought either as a whole or in its parts” (V.151).

The so-called “prophecies” are merely vague political speculations that do not even begin to rival biblical prophecy — either in precision or in chronological proximity to the events they supposedly depict (cf. 30:2-4). Scientific accuracy can hardly be claimed when the Qur’an suggests that the human fetus results from “sperm” that changes into “a clot of congealed blood,” which then becomes bones, later to be covered with flesh (23:14).

The Qur’an is morally flawed in numerous respects. For example, those who oppose Mohammed should be subjected to “execution [i.e., decapitation], or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hand and feet from opposite sides...” (5:36). Women are

treated shamefully in the Moslem religion. If a woman is guilty of “ill-conduct,” she may be admonished, deprived of sex, or beaten — in moderation (4:34).

CONCLUSION

How could one deal with Islam without exposing the errors of the Qur’an? Surely our brethren who advise: “don’t attack [the Qur’an],” have not carefully considered this matter. We must be kind, but we cannot ignore error.

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"BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED"

Aaron M. M. Purvis

A lot of gibberish has been advanced over the years in relation to this marvelous statement from Paul's pen. Just lately I had the opportunity to speak with a lady regarding how alien sinners come to be saved. She intimated to me that when a sinner decides to believe in the Lord, all the sinner must do is to pray for God's mercy in Jesus' name and he/she will be saved. We hear this a lot from televangelists and from various denominational preachers. I would be indebted greatly to the person who could point me in the proper direction as to where that passage of scripture is found in the Word of God. I truly would! Because once the passage is cited, and once it is established by that citation that sinners are saved upon praying for God's mercy, then I'll be able, in all good conscience, to affirm that proposition. In the meantime, however, my conscience keeps tediously tugging on my mind to the contrary to recollect the account of the conversion of Saul (Paul), not to mention the host of other accounts of conversion in the book of Acts, which utterly conflict with that erroneous ideology.

PRAYER DID NOT SAVE SAUL

When Saul was on the road to Damascus, he evidently saw around noon, "a great light" which "shone from heaven" (Acts 22:6). In the state of awe with which an event such as that tends to be accompanied, and being dumbfounded by the fact that his prior convictions were completely misguided, Paul could only now do what the Lord would have him to do (Acts 9:6). He was told to go to Damascus and to wait for someone who would tell him what to do to be saved. This, Paul did.

Before Paul met Ananias, the one who would tell him what to do and hence before Paul was told by Ananias to have his sins washed away by God in water baptism (Acts 22:16), the Lord told Ananias that Paul, who had already confessed Jesus as "Lord", was praying (Acts 9:11). Did you catch that? He was praying, and yet was *still waiting to be pardoned from sin!* It wasn't until he met Ananias, was

loosed from the scales which obscured his sight, was told his duty in proclaiming that message with which the majority of people in this life have yet to be enlightened, and finally to *be baptized* that his sins were then, and not before, washed away by the blood of Jesus (Acts 22:10-16; cf. Eph. 1:7). If prayer saved Saul, neither Saul, Ananias, nor God knew it, for none of them would have made Saul wait for Ananias, nor would they have proclaimed that his sins were washed away only after he had arisen and been baptized! Indeed, Saul was saved, not by prayer, but by his surrender to God in obeying the gospel of His Dear Son (cf. Rom. 6:16-18; Heb. 5:9).

Upon hearing the Biblical doctrine that at baptism is when one's sins are washed away, our dear lady friend rehearsed that same old argument based upon the much-abused statement from Paul in Ephesians two that her denomination's leaders had undoubtedly countless times informed her to misquote unawares. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Eph. 2:8-9). The argument usually avowed regarding this passage (that is used to refute the Bible's clear teaching on the necessity of baptism for salvation, cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; I Peter 3:21), typically flows thusly: 1) We're saved by grace; not by works. 2) Baptism is a work. 3) Therefore, baptism is not necessary for salvation. Let's see if this rationale has any merit.

GRACE ILLUSTRATED

Parents often give gifts to their children on their birthday. The gift is given freely out of love and favor from parent to child. It is not given out of necessity because the child earned or merited the gift. It is not based upon the child's works, but by the grace (favor) of the parents that the child is given the gift. But the child is not necessarily without conditions of action in the reception of the free gift either. The child must still take the package in which the gift is contained, untie the

bow which binds the wrapping, unwrap the box, open it, and take the gift out in order to truly enjoy the benefits of the freely, graciously-given gift. Yet, did the child, in thus doing, somehow nullify the fact that the parent gave the gift out of love and grace and not merit? No! Again, NO! The gift was given by grace, not by works, even though some works still contributed to the reception of the gift (after all, you can't have a gift without first *receiving* it!).

To read of a great Biblical illustration, read Joshua 6 and note the fact that: 1) God had given, through his grace/favor, the city of Jericho into the hands of Israel, and 2) God had them march around Jericho once a day for six days, and seven times the seventh day. Though given by grace (not works), Israel still had to act in some capacity to obtain the gift of God. Israel's actions did not nullify God's free gift — they did not earn Jericho. It was the gift of God, their works notwithstanding.

GRACE, WORKS, AND BAPTISM JUXTAPOSED

Paul says we are saved by grace, not by works. Our lady friend, along with those like her, will distort this passage to mean that *nothing we do* contributes to our salvation. We play *no part at all*. God does it all. And so, baptism is excluded. Now, based upon what you've read so far, do you find something peculiar with this line of reasoning? The argument is made that *belief and prayer* saves the sinner! I don't know about you, but I have yet to find one morsel of logic in the assertion that baptism can't save because, allegedly, *no works whatsoever* save us, and yet in virtually the very same breath claim that *believing and praying* (both *works* done by the mind and mouth of man) are activities that *can and do* save! Inconsistency is the progeny of all lies! If baptism is precluded from salvation on the basis of Ephesians 2:8-10, then so is prayer! Anyone who doesn't see that, doesn't want to see it.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans

4:4-5, Paul specifies that he is writing about works that give grounds *for boasting* (v.9). Paul is talking about the *basis* of our salvation or the reason for which we are saved; not about the *conditions* or the specific requirements pertaining thereto. In other words, God is the one who pardons, not man. Salvation is not of ourselves (Eph. 2:8). The grace of God is the *basis* of our salvation. We readily agree that we are not saved by works of merit or human righteousness (cf. Phil. 3:9; Rom. 10:1-3). For then, our salvation would not be of God, but rather ourselves and our own striving.

What one needs to know, is that not every work done by men gives grounds for boasting. There are works which cause us to say *“We are unprofitable servants: we have only done that which was our duty to do”* (Luke 17:10). When we engage in these activities, we are not able to say *“We are profitable servants: we’ve done great things that ought to bring glory to my name.”* No, just because God has required that we do something to *receive* his gift of salvation, does not mean that we save ourselves *without the grace of God*, and hence have opportunity to *“boast.”* God’s grace, coupled with our humble obedience and reliance upon that grace, is how God saves the sinner *“by grace through faith”* (v.8).

So what does that have to do with baptism? The phrase *“not of works”* in this passage, does not refer to baptism (obeying the Gospel). There is nothing in baptism or obeying the Gospel to cause anyone to boast! How can anyone see any grounds for boasting in believing in one who died for us (John 8:24), humbly repenting of sins (Luke 13:3), confessing faith in Jesus (Rom. 10:10) and in surrendering one’s will to God in baptism *for the remission of sins* (Acts 2:38)? Such acts are acts of humiliation, not exaltation! Besides, when I turn over to Colossians 2:12-13, I find that baptism is an *“operation of God”* in which God forgives us of all trespasses. So if baptism could be argued to be a work of any kind, it would have to be affirmed that it is God’s work, and not man’s, and, certainly, there’s no glory for man in that!

This proves all the more that Paul did not have baptism, nor any other work of faith in mind when he wrote that we are saved *“not of works, lest any man should boast.”* Indeed, we are

saved by grace through faith, but *“the faith that saves is the faith that obeys,”* meriting nothing, and yet gaining everything.

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I BELIEVE IN POSITIVE PREACHING!

Steven D. Cline

Throughout this great brotherhood, there seems to be a renewed emphasis on positive preaching, ie., preaching upbuilding, non-critical sermons on the good and, indeed, wonderful things in the Bible. And I, for one, would like to announce to the brotherhood that I believe in positive preaching!

What splendor we behold as the preacher exhorts on the beauty and the glories of that eternally wonderful place called Heaven! What happiness fills and overflows our hearts with joy when we hear the speaker describe how we should love one another. How happy yet humble we feel when we listen to the minister tell of the grace of God that He bestows upon us, his undeserving, usually unappreciative creatures. Oh yes! Let it be known...I believe in positive preaching! May it continue! May it increase!

Yet, never let it be said that I believe in positive preaching *only*. On the contrary, there is a place, and furthermore, a need for negative preaching, ie., preaching rebuking, reproving sermons on the darker things in the Bible.

We need to hear of the miserable consequences of sin. We have to be reminded constantly that it is possible to become lackadaisical (lazy) in our work and worship and thus slip into apostasy. We must be told what God’s Holy Word teaches on adultery, false teachers, and the horrors of Hell.

Apparently, God approves of both positive and negative preaching. Hear His admonition unto Jeremiah: *“Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, [negative] to build, and to plant”* [positive] (Jer. 1:9-10).

Jesus believed in both types of preaching. He taught that whosoever believes in Him shall be resurrected, never again to die (John 11:25,26). He said that we should always do good unto our neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). He admonished that his people should be a forgiving folk (Matt. 6:14). Yet he also spoke of the torments of Hell and that it is the eternal destiny of most (Matt. 7:13,14,21-23). He also talked of hypocrisy and publicly pinpointed the Pharisees (Matt. 23, entire chapter).

Paul preached God’s grace (Eph. 2:8) and the greatness of love (Rom. 5:8); yet he also warned of God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:4-6) and the danger of apostasy (Heb. 3:12).

John taught that we should love and fellowship one another (I John 3:11,14); yet he also said that we should not bid God speed to the false teacher (II John 9-11).

During my years in the church, I have been in congregations that seldom touched the negative. Sin and Hell hardly mentioned. On the other hand, I’ve seen churches with almost no positive. The members seemed to be afraid. Grace and love were hardly spoken of.

Positive sermons? Yes. But completely? No.

Negative sermons? Indeed. But exclusively? By no means.

We may not like preaching negatively. I for one, have no pleasure in preaching eternal torment, apostasy, etc. But Paul told Timothy to *“preach the word”* (II Tim. 4:2). He never told Timothy that he had to like what he preached, be it positive or negative.

Yes, we must preach the positive AND we must also preach the negative.

However, let us make every endeavor to have a proper balance in our preaching, ie., both positive and negative sermons, and by so doing, be pleasing to the Master, for both types have a positive goal, ie., to usher us into Heaven!

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

"I thought the article in November's STOP on fellowshipping denominations was right on target and Biblical. I did find it interesting that the Bypass congregation in Idabel, OK said to stop sending it to them on the back of this very edition. On Nov. 18, 2005, there was an article on the front page of the local newspaper, the McCurtain Daily Gazette entitled, "Local churches serving more than just Thanksgiving dinner." I quote, "Members of the Bypass Church of Christ will be host to one of the largest Thanksgiving dinners ever prepared in the county. ... Other churches in the county will be sponsoring the meal as well. "Assembly of God, Haworth, First Baptist, Calvary Baptist and Redland Methodist Church, Redland, will all join us for the special day," said Brinkley. (LauraNell Brinkley, church member). It is interesting, but the Bypass congregation never even asked other churches of Christ to participate. I wonder why? Then I see that they no longer want to receive STOP, again, I wonder why? Anyway, I thought you might find this interesting since Bypass no longer wants to receive STOP. God bless" **...Dan Fredman, Broken Bow, OK.** "Please remove me from your mailing list. You have a very good letter but I have other interests at the present time. I may at some other time want to get the letter. Thanks in advance" **...Wayne Holloway, Hohenwald TN.** "I recently received a copy of *Seek The Old Paths* publication and discovered **WSOJ-LP radio.** I really enjoy the programming. Is there a list of speakers in the "search" section or do you have to type in the speaker? Keep up the good work" **...Marcus Morris.** [NOTE: You can search for a speaker by name at www.wsoj.net. We do not have a list of all the speakers. -editor]. "Thank you" **...Vince & Tammy Maddox, Dothan, AL.** "My sister and her husband usually read your publication when they come to my house. I think they would like to receive their own copy to go over at their leisure. I would like to say that my husband and I have been on your mailing list for several years, and we really enjoy receiving the paper and checking everything out. Mr. Paul Evins got us started on it, and I just wish there were more publications like it that could be trusted as much when it comes to staying in line with the Bible and the teachings of Jesus. Keep up the good work" **...Paula Long.** "I haven't received any issues since my graduation from Browntrail School of Preaching in May 2004 and have so missed them" **...Neal Massey, Arapaho, OK.** "Return to sender" **...Wes Force, Valdosta, GA.** "Please remove my name from your list. Thank you" **...Phyllis Cipolla, Sun City West, AZ.** "I sure appreciate receiving STOP. It is a wonderful paper and I read every one cover to cover. Don't understand people always wanting to be removed from the mailing list for it" **...Jennie Burgess.** "Christian greetings. Hope things are well with you. In a recent STOP issue (Nov. 2005) your front page article about fellowshipping denominations was excellent. I have a friend who does not subscribe but would like a copy of the article to give to his elders. Thanks and God bless" **...Ken Gardner, Clinton, MS.** [NOTE: Back issues can be searched and printed out at www.seektheoldpaths.com/stop.htm, -editor]. "Can't tell you how much I enjoy the paper. My husband passed away June 27 and it was a great loss to me after married 67 years. I am enclosing a contribution in his honor. Also, would you please send STOP to a sister in Christ" **...Elsie Luttrell, Franklin, NC.** [NOTE: We are saddened by your loss. It is a great tribute to the memory of your husband for your marriage of 67 years. We pray the Lord's blessings will be upon you. -editor]. "With the coming of the new year, comes a change of address. I would like to continue to receive STOP" **...Michael Wilk, Rowlett, TX.** "We receive STOP and really enjoy this publication. During our December business meeting we discussed your publication and how much we like receiving it each month. We voted to send \$50 to help with the costs associated with publishing your newsletter each month. We are currently without a preacher and the men of the church are filling in with the preaching duties, which is one of the reasons your newsletter is so valuable to us. It is important to have sound publications such as STOP, not just for our members, but also for sermon topics. We hope and pray that you will be able to continue with STOP and we look forward to reading them each month" **...Rob Diel, Romeo church of Christ, Romeo, MI.** [NOTE: Thanks so much for your monthly support. It really helps. We appreciate good brethren like you and are glad to be of assistance. You are welcome to use whatever materials you can from *Seek The Old Paths*, -editor]. "I enjoy the good work you are doing through STOP" **...Ronald Keever, Lubbock, TX.** "I read STOP and would like to be on your mail-

ing list. Thanks" **...Robert Tice, Little Rock, AR.** "Please send STOP to... I told her it was the best paper in the brotherhood. Thanks" **...Frankie Bailey, Middleton, TN.** "Thank you for the good work you are doing with STOP. Enclosed you will find a check to help a little with the costs of putting out the paper. With appreciation" **...V. Glenn McCoy, Yorba Linda, CA.** "Here is a little contribution to help out on your paper. I really enjoy it so much. Would you please send it to a new convert? I know it will help him learn more about the church and Jesus Christ. Thank you" **...Name withheld.** "Best wishes as you continue the wonderful paper" **...Florice Cardwell, Oxford, MS.** "Enclosed is ... to help with publication costs. Keep up the good work" **...Sandra Way, Jackson, TN.** "Please send me *Seek The Old Paths*. A contribution is enclosed to assist with publishing and mailing costs. Thank you very much" **...Roger MacKenzie, Dalton, GA.** "Please accept this contribution toward payment for the printer fund. I am so thankful for STOP" **...Dan Huffines, Gainesboro, TN.** [NOTE: As of this writing, the printer is almost paid for. We sincerely appreciate those who have helped in its purchase. It is a great blessing to be associated with good brethren. God bless you all. -editor]. "You know how much I appreciate STOP and all that everyone involved are doing. I wanted to send this check to go on the printer. May God continue to bless all of you for what you're doing in upholding the truth to a world that wants more and more to 'do religion' their way" **...Name Withheld.** "I am an elder at the West Columbia Church of Church in West Columbia, SC. Can you send *Seek the Old Paths* to this congregation also? A long time ago I used the be on your mailing list when I was living in West Virginia. I always enjoy your paper" **...Donald Klieves, Lexington, SC.** "I am so impressed with the work that you all do at STOP. Please accept my wife's and my small gift in appreciation for what you all do. God bless" **...Lloyd & Betty Sue Ellis, Sugar Land, TX.** "Please send your paper to my granddaughter. I enjoy getting it every month" **...Pat Brumbelow, Pocahtontas, TN.**

Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the **East End Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is mailed **FREE** upon request. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless otherwise noted. Articles are also welcomed.

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