

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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FUNDING CHURCH WORKS

Cade K. Somers

“The love of money is the root of all evil” (I Tim. 6:10). This sentence sermon holds the key to understanding why the rich farmer built bigger barns and why wealthy and impoverished people alike are never satisfied (Luke 12:16-21; cf. Phil. 4:11). Repercussions for loving money include urges to gamble, steal and scam — acts of greed and desperation. The love of money is often fed by the love to spend money; therefore, many who find money promptly dispense of it as if it were a hot potato. Even churches are caught up in this form of covetousness. They spend endless dollars building and maintaining massive facilities on tens of acres only to realize they want more — amplified auditoriums, lavished lobbies and bejeweled gymnasiums. Months, maybe years, later the elders realize church funds are low and financial desperation sets in. “How are we going to pay the preacher?” “We may be forced to stop supporting a missionary overseas.” “Do we really have to help the less-fortunate right now?”

I believe most people are sympathetic toward organizations like the Red Cross, American Cancer Society and United Cerebral Palsy which require public donations to function. When you see their volunteers on the street corner or at a storefront, you're compelled to give. Increasingly common are churches that have joined the beggary, assuming the same role as deprived secular institutions. As a passerby, I would be forced to question why the church, having multi-

million-dollar facilities and hundreds of members is holding bake sales, yard sales, raffles and car washes to make ends meet. Smells fishy. Does the missionary overseas really owe gratitude to a church that budgets based on what it receives from local unbelievers, bar-hoppers, fornicators, liars and hypocrites? If I were that missionary, I'd feel worthless and unappreciated. After Hurricane Katrina, many churches gathered clothes to send the needy. Some solicited communities to donate; partly, the result was an array of bikinis, skimpy lingerie and printed-tees with inappropriate language or pictures. But, so long as its money, the attitude is, “We'll take it.”

Funding church works is a subject that would be more difficult to discern if God had not spoken so clearly about it. “*Now concerning the collection for the saints... Upon the first day of the [literally, every] week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come*” (I Cor. 16:1,2). The church was to give for the work of benevolence to needy Jerusalem saints (Acts 11:29). Their giving was to be done “*every man according as he purposeth in his heart...; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*” (II Cor. 9:7). The New Testament church, comprised of a membership of Christians (I Cor. 12:27), works in three areas: 1) *evangelism* (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 8:4), 2) *edification* (Eph. 4:11-16; I Cor. 14:26) and 3) *benevolence* (I Tim. 5:16; James 1:27).

While a facility is expedient as a place for the church to assemble and enjoy fellowship (cf. I Cor. 16:19), the grandiosity of the meeting-place falls in the realm of sound judgment. The local church should do its best to build modestly and conservatively, for it is the Lord's money we use and it is the Lord Himself we represent. It says nothing of stewardship for a church to flatter itself with costly extravagances and then to cough out pennies to worthwhile works (cf. Titus 3:14; I Tim. 6:18). Jesus taught His disciples to serve God first and others second (Luke 10:27; cf. I Cor. 9:19). Self should be last.

David said, “*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*” (Psalm 37:25). For what righteousness we do, God rewards (Psalm 106:3; I John 2:29); therefore, may we note what righteousness does for the local church: 1) Righteousness takes care of the needs of the church that seeks God first (Matt. 6:33); 2) Righteousness does not lead to the church begging for bread or soliciting the common man for help (Gal. 6:10); 3) Righteousness does not leave one church isolated with no friend (Prov. 18:24; I John 1:3,7; cf. I Kings 19:14,18). Only the church whose friends are few and whose only strength is self will find no funds for works of evangelism, edification and benevolence and conclude that it must sell its products

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Funding Church Works...



Editorial...

SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Garland M. Robinson

The *old man of sin* (an alien sinner, a lost person) is buried in water baptism. The *new creature in Christ* (a Christian, one saved from sins) is raised up from baptism. Romans 6:3-6 and then verses 17-18 makes this clear. You don't bury a live person. You bury a dead person. One does not partake of Christ's death, burial and resurrection at the moment of *faith*. One partakes of Christ's death, burial and resurrection in *water baptism* (Rom. 6:3-6). Christ shed his saving blood in his death and it's when a person is baptized into his death that we contact His blood (Rom. 6:3-6).

The blood of Christ is what washes sins away (Rev. 1:5). But **WHEN** does one contact His blood? It's when one is baptized to wash away their sins (by his blood, Acts 22:16). This is salvation by faith! We have no confidence in ourselves. We do not trust in works of merit. They cannot save. Salvation comes at the point of *obedient faith*, not at the point of *faith alone* (or faith that is without works/obedience). Obedience proves one has saving faith. Jesus saves those who OBEY. He does not save those who do not obey. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23, "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" The moment one believes (faith only), there is no obedience.

Abraham was justified by faith, but not until he obeyed (WORKED) God's command to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He performed God's work, not his own work. He performed (obeyed, worked) what God commanded. His

faith was useless at the point he simply believed. But, his faith was made complete (perfect, alive) at the moment he OBEYED.

James chapter two is complementing Paul in Romans chapters four and five. James is explaining exact details about **WHEN** saving faith works. Paul does not deny the teaching of James and James does not deny the teaching of Paul. They go hand in hand. The teaching of God is not either FAITH or WORKS. It is not one or the other, it is BOTH. Faith and works (obedience) cannot be separated. To separate the works of obedience from faith makes faith dead (vain, useless). The works James is talking about are NOT *works of the law of Moses* because they cannot save (Gal. 2:16). He is not talking about *works of man's righteousness* because they cannot save and have no connection with salvation (Titus 3:5). He is not talking about *works of merit* where God would owe us (Eph. 2:8-9). James is talking about *works of obedience* — doing what God commands. We trust in God who gave the commands. We do not trust in the works He commanded and/or our performance of those works. We humbly submit to the Lord in trusting faith and comply with His demands.

Was Noah saved the moment he believed God or when he did what God said in building the ark? Had he believed only, he would have drowned. But, by his obedience, I Peter 3:21 says he was saved "by water." Does this mean the waters of the flood saved Noah? Yes, that is what the verse says. But, is that all there is? No. We must understand something more in light of the rest of the Bible. And, we must certainly take ALL the Bible says on the subject of salvation, not just the parts we want to take — not just the parts we want to believe. Many want to pick out faith and exclude the rest. But not those who love the Lord! Let's take ALL the Bible says on the subject.

That does not minimize faith at all. That simply takes God at His word.

ALL that we do in the plan of salvation is done by FAITH. We REPENT by faith, we CONFESS by faith, we're BAPTIZED by faith. Without faith, all these things are useless! That is why the Bible sums up all the acts of obedience in the plan of salvation by saying that we are saved by FAITH.

A living faith, an active faith, a saving faith, is one that OBEYS ALL the plan of salvation. That is why the jailor was told to "believe" and he would be saved (cf. Acts 16:31-33). Belief sums up ALL the plan of salvation. The word belief stands for the whole plan of salvation. It is a figure of speech (synecdoche) where a "part" stands for the "whole." Saving faith trusts in God, not ourselves. There's nothing we can do, of ourselves, that will bring about salvation. Salvation does not arise from our own futile works.

Look back at Noah. I Peter 3:21 says he was saved by "water." In like manner (in similar fashion), BAPTISM doth also NOW SAVE US. The usual rebuttal to baptism saving us is to ignore or dismiss what this part of the verse says and move on to the next phrase and quibble about a clear conscience. But, there should be no quibble. When one's active faith prompts him to be baptized, he certainly has a good conscience (a clear conscience) because he knows he has done that which God commands him to do. This is not man's work, this is the work God devised and commands him to do. We trust God will extend salvation through the atoning blood of Christ because of His sacrifice on the cross. Baptism has nothing to do with washing the physical body. There's nothing different or unusual about the water. It's just water. We can drink it. We can take a bath in it. We can water our garden or wash our car with it. But, we trust God by submitting to the act of being baptized in water because that is God's command. We know that Jesus shed His blood in His death and we know that in water baptism we contact His blood because baptism is a likeness of His death, burial and resurrection.

Water baptism is the new birth. In John 3:3-5 we read, "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 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. "As Jesus died on the cross, a sinner dies to sin. As Jesus was buried in a tomb, a sinner is buried in water. As Jesus was raised from the tomb, the one who arises from baptism is a new creature, one who is now in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), alive from the dead (Rom. 6:11,13) and washed in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). The one baptized in water now walks (lives) in newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and is no longer of servant of sin (Rom. 6:12-13). This is a beautiful picture. Man could have never thought of such a thing. This is God's doing. All man does to be saved is done in faith, humbly taking God at His word and obeying His commands.

Have YOU been born again? Without it, you will not be saved (John 3:3-5). Denominational doctrine cannot tell us what the new birth is. Denominationalism refuses to believe what Jesus told Nicodemus.

Being born again involves water. The only water we read about in the process of becoming a child of God is water baptism. Drinking water has no connection with salvation. Taking a bath in water has no connection with salvation. But being baptized in water has everything to do with salvation. The act of being baptized in water is an act of faith, an act in which we trust in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his precious blood he shed in his death. God chose the water of baptism to be the dividing line between spiritual death in the world and being spiritually alive in Christ — between one dying in their sins and one having their sins washed away.

Jesus said water was essential in entering the kingdom. Denominationalism says water has nothing to do with entering the kingdom. Excuse me, but I'll accept and follow Jesus, not the doctrines of men. The faith that justifies, the faith that is approved of the Lord, the faith that saves, is faith that OBEYS. It is a faith that submits to being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; John 3-5; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21).

Do YOU believe? Will YOU obey?

WHERE'S THE FIGHT?

Alton W. Fonville

Changes have taken place. A few years back, "where's the fight" was a phrase that meant excitement and people gathered around. An activity was taking place which meant opponents were "settling their differences." This was the case in the world around us and also in the Lord's church. But, things have changed. The "fight" has almost ceased to exist among far too many of the Lord's church.

Headlines on some of the papers throughout the brotherhood give the shameful details: "Nations largest church of Christ adding instrumental service and serving the Lord's Supper on Saturday night." "Leaders say there was little opposition to the announcement." Brethren, where's the fight which we entered when we took that "oath of office" to serve the Lord, and became a member of His army? Certainly, it is not a physical fight and our weapons are not physical. False doctrines and practices, principalities, spiritual wickedness and rulers of the darkness of this world are the things mentioned specifically by Paul, and for which he fought his "good fight of faith." He was literally a prisoner in bonds for his constant fight against these things, and he warned everyone night and day with tears, about being constant in this fight, and using him as an example to follow (Ephesians and Philippians).

At one time not too many years back, the church of Christ was known as a "fighter." Members were known as "people of the Book" — "walking Bibles." The church was growing faster then than at any other time in its history, but, we have changed and the "fight" is not in us now. We wonder what has happened and where is that fight. It does not take too long to find the answers. The Book has been replaced with words which were not so harsh and the desire to please ourselves and be entertained and to be at peace with the world, being thought of as a "group which fits in with the world" has nearly done away with that fighting spirit which Jesus Christ

and the apostles wanted the Christian to have.

How does that fit with the scriptures and its teaching? Let that "inspired word" from God speak to mine and your hearts. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (I John 2:15). *"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ... And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:34,36,37). *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Rom. 12:2). *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil. 2:5,8). *"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (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: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things)"* (Phil. 3:17-19).

Those words from Almighty God have been perverted, twisted, smoothed down, forgotten willingly and otherwise neglected to the loss of our fighting spirit which each Christian should have. We have "loved this world and its pleasures more than God." We have not humbled ourselves as servants of Christ — but to our own bellies. We have traded God's word for "smooth sayings" and loved to have it so. We have become "friends" with this world and an enemy to God. We sit idly by and let the "chaste virgin" become a spotted and blemished "social club" which fits in with this sin-sick world. We refuse to fight the good fight of faith. We will pay the price except we repent.

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SOME CRITICAL QUESTIONS IN ROMANS 6:1-4

Roger Campbell

As a background to Romans 6, consider some of the things that we know about the people to whom the Book of Romans was written. They are called “saints” (1:7). Their faith was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (1:8). They were justified by faith (5:1), having been made free from sin when they obeyed the Gospel in water baptism (6:17-18).

Just prior to the instruction that we have in Romans 6, in the latter portion of chapter five we read about a contrast between sin and righteousness, a contrast between the effects of the actions of Adam and Jesus, and we further learn that sin is awful, but God’s grace can overcome sin and its consequences. With this context in mind, here is the message of Romans 6:1-4: *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*

This text presents questions about what to say, continuing in sin, and knowledge of baptism. Let us examine these questions, recognizing that questions cause us to think. They challenge us and they can stir us to action.

Question 1: “What shall we say?” (6:1)

Say about what? In the context, the points under consideration are sin, grace and proper living. What shall we say about such matters? The principle would be, in all spiritual matters, what should we say? The answer, of course, is that we should say what God says. The prophet Micaiah said it this way: *“As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak”* (II Chron. 18:13). What shall we say? On any biblical subject, we should teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), not “adding to” or “taking away” from

what God says. We should be committed to speaking what people need to hear, not what they want to hear. Surely the Lord knew what He was doing when He gave the charge to preach the Gospel, speaking as the oracles of God (Mark 16:15; I Peter 4:11).

Whatever Paul might write about sin, grace, and proper living, his instruction would come from God and nowhere else.

Question 2: “Shall we continue in sin?” (6:1)

The full question is, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” If someone understood that God’s grace is demonstrated each time a child of God sins, but then repents and God accepts Him again, then perhaps he might think, “The more a person sins, the more God’s grace is shown. Thus, it would not be a bad thing to keep on sinning.” What is God’s answer to such an idea? “God forbid” [certainly not] (6:2). Again, God says that we are dead to sin (6:2,11), so sin is no longer to dominate in our life.

When one becomes a child of God, he/she must get out and stay out of the sinning business! We are not to be slaves of sin, but rather slaves of righteousness (6:12-16,22). In Romans 6:6 we read that “henceforth we should not serve sin.” We are a new creation in the Christ, so old things have passed away as we have put off the old man and his sinful ways (II Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:5-9). We are instructed to abstain from the fleshly lusts which war against our soul (I Peter 2:11).

But, what if? What if a disciple of Jesus decides to just go ahead and continue in sin? In the first place, such a one is the slave of sin. *“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness”* (Rom. 6:16)? The same context shows that the one who continues in sin is dead spiritually, as the wages of sin is death (6:23). We learn elsewhere that the child of God who walks in darkness (remains

in sin) forfeits his/her fellowship with God (I John 1:6). Ultimately, the slave of sin (unrighteous person) shall not inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9). Because of the weakness of our flesh, we will commit sin. To deny this truth is to deceive ourselves and reject the Bible’s plain teaching (I John 1:8). However, we must not allow sin to rule in our lives, that is, we must not become sin’s slave. Once again, shall we continue in sin? God forbid.

Question 3: “Know ye not, that so many of us as we were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (6:3)

Remember, Romans 6 is a context that speaks about sin and the need to avoid staying in it. Do you know the truth about baptism? Do you accept that truth?

Truth about baptism: A person gets into the Christ by being baptized into Him (6:3). Galatians 3:27 states, *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* Scripturally speaking, the only way to get into the Christ, in Whom are all spiritual blessings, including redemption (Rom. 3:24), is to be baptized into Him. Those that have not yet been baptized into Him are still lost in sin.

Truth about baptism: A person gets into the death of the Christ by being baptized into it (6:3). We are “justified by his blood” (Rom. 5:9) and reconciled to God “by the death of his Son” (5:10). Since the Lord shed His blood in His death (by which we are justified), and since one gets into the death of Jesus’ death by being baptized (6:3), then it follows that scriptural baptism is a required part of the process by which one is justified in God’s sight. Just as there could be no justification without the death of Jesus, so a sinner cannot be justified without water baptism.

Truth about baptism: We are buried with Jesus into death. *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death”* (6:4). Just as Jesus died and was buried in a tomb, so a person that is dead in sin is *“buried with him in baptism”* (Col. 2:12).

Truth about baptism: Following baptism, one is to walk in newness of life. *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (6:4). The fact that we should walk in newness of life is another answer to the question, “Shall we continue in sin?” Of course we should not remain in sin, because we are

supposed to be a new person with a new outlook! That means that sin should be “out the door.” Note also that a person has a new life, i.e., he/she is born again, only after baptism. That does not mean that water can save a person, however it does indicate that baptism in water is a required act in order to be cleansed from sin.

Romans 6:1-4 is a clear, memorable section of scripture. The three

questions that we have considered from this passage about what to say, continuing in sin, and knowledge of baptism, cause us to think seriously about what the Lord wants us to be.

Now that we have learned from this passage, what shall we do with our knowledge? Should we not apply it to our lives and strive to live as servants of righteousness?

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WHAT DOES IT COST TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Alan Caudle

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:28)

Many times, children of God find it difficult to understand why those outside of Christ do not or will not submit themselves to the Gospel, even when the urgency of accepting God’s soul-saving plan is presented to them in the clearest of terms. Aside from the problem of those who feel they have already been “saved” through the misguidance of denominational dogma, it is indeed a wonder why most morally good people do not gladly accept the Bible’s teaching concerning God’s great and only way of salvation.

But the devil understands why...and within his arsenal of evil endeavors is the proliferation of the belief that it costs too much to be a Christian — too many denials of self, too many pleasures lost, too much fun to be missed. Young people especially are vulnerable to such thoughts, and may find themselves asking, “Is it true? Is there a price? How much is it? If I become a Christian, will I be happy?” The God-given answers and their subsequent lessons are vitally important to the souls of young and old alike.

There Is A Cost To Discipleship. It would be deceitful to say that there is no cost, no price to pay in becoming a Christian and living the Christian life. Jesus himself said that one should “count the cost.” It would also be false to say that sin has no pleasures. Hebrews 11:25 speaks

of Moses who chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” There is pleasure in sin, but it is not of long duration — it is only for a short time.

In view of the fact that a cost is involved, someone might ask: *How much must I love the Lord and what must I be willing to sacrifice* in order to pay the cost of being a Christian? The answers can be found in two passages of the Bible. The first in Matthew 22:37: *“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”* The second in Romans 12:1-2: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”*

The law of service demands that one follow Christ, as can be seen in Matthew 16:24: *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* This truth is essential for those who would pay the price to take on the name of Christ — to serve and follow Him all the days of their lives.

The First Cost Is To Inform Oneself. The builder of the tower in Luke 14:28 is told to sit down and count the cost. Certainly, it would be foolish to do otherwise. A builder must have that information in order

to determine whether or not he can complete his endeavor. He must be well informed in order to begin and finish the work he has planned to do. In much the same way, we must inform ourselves concerning the Christian life. The apostle Paul was concerned with this in II Timothy 2:15 when he urged, *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* Informing ourselves is a life-long process that leads to the richest of rewards.

The Second Cost Is To Transform Oneself. The aforementioned passage of Romans 12:2 teaches this very thing. When a person becomes a Christian — when he is purified and redeemed by the blood of Christ — a great transformation occurs in his life. If this change does not happen, a conversion has not taken place. The soul is purified when the heart’s desires are changed and altered, from that of evil to that of righteousness — transformed through obedience to God’s word. *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (I Peter 1:22). His word must dwell in our minds and control our actions: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 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” (Col. 3:16-17). We must inform ourselves as to what the Lord wants us to be in order for a transformation to take place.

The Third Cost Is To Deny Oneself. There is no sin more prevalent than selfishness. Jesus taught in Matthew 16:24 that a person should “deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” Those guilty of selfishness cannot worship God as they ought nor will they be interested in helping others as expected. It is no wonder that so many fail to worship and serve Jehovah as sincere, consecrated Christians, when they desire everything for themselves (including money, pleasures, talents, love, desires and glory) and little or nothing for their Heavenly Father. The story of the rich young ruler should

be a well-remembered lesson, along with the fearful fact that one who refuses to renounce the world will also be renounced by Christ.

The Fourth Cost Is To Lose Oneself. Jesus taught a vital truth in John 12:25 when he exclaimed, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” The meaning is simple: one who loves his life too much will live for things of short duration (the pleasures of this earth) with little or no thought of eternity. But the person who is willing to give up the “good things” in this life (who “loses his life” for Christ and His cause) shall find a home eternal in heaven.

Are you engrossed in His work, in talking to others about their souls’ condition, in trying to influence oth-

ers by your conduct and righteous living? If so, you can say that you are losing your life. If you are willing to suffer rebuke and ridicule while you stand for the right, you are losing your life for Christ and one day you will find it in eternity. The more we do for others (and for Jesus), the more we lose ourselves in self-forgetful service.

It is essential that we count the cost of serving Christ, for it does cost something. We must be informed. We must be transformed. We must learn and determine to deny ourselves as Jesus teaches. And, we must lose ourselves in service to the Saviour. Only then can we ever enjoy and understand the Christian life and the pleasures to be found therein.

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THE OBEDIENCE OF THE RECHABITES

Tom Wacaster

When Israel entered into and occupied the land of Canaan, there was a small tribal band of people who inhabited the desert land south of Judah. Commonly referred to as the Midianites, they were also known as Kenites. They were wandering smiths who formed a metallurgy guild in an age when such talent and ability was confined to only a few. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was a Kenite (Judges 1:16). When Israel invaded the land of Canaan under the direction of Joshua, these Kenites accompanied God’s people as far as Jericho (Judges 1:16) and then returned to their homeland south of Judah. One of the descendants of these Kenites was Jonadab, the son of Rechab. Jonadab is known for his association with Jehu. When Jehu was sent to destroy the seed of Ahab, Jonadab was invited to go with him and witness his “zeal for the Lord” (II Kings 10:16). Jonadab saw first hand the fruit of Israel’s wickedness and God’s judgment upon that ungodly and apostate nation. The Northern Kingdom eventually fell as the result of God’s punishment upon those ten tribes who refused to listen to the prophets and repent of their evil way.

Go forward in time to the days of

the Southern Kingdom alone. Judah is following in the footsteps of her wicked sister, Israel. Jeremiah is sent to Judah to warn of the need to repent and obey. The weeping prophet is told to “Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink” (Jer. 35:1-2). The Rechabites were the descendants of Rechab, the father of Jonadab. Evidently, before Jonadab passed unto his eternal reward, he instructed his children, and all generations yet unborn, with regard to certain moral and social practices. “Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever. Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers” (Jer. 35:6-7).

When Jeremiah instructed them to “drink wine,” these descendants refused Jeremiah’s offer and provided the following explanation: “Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us” (Jer. 35:8a). Speaking through Jeremiah the prophet, **God holds the Rechabites up as an**

example of obedience before Judah. What a stark contrast! While Israel remained in obstinate rebellion, here were a group of people who were determined to remain faithful to the instructions of their fathers.

May I suggest the following points with regard to the obedience of the Rechabites.

First, **the Rechabites were obedient in spite of the CIRCUMSTANCES.** Surrounded by the inhabitants of Judah who were living like the world, these Rechabites could easily have succumbed to the temptation set before them. After all, if “God’s people” could drink wine, commit adultery, worship false god’s, et al, then why should they, the Rechabites, abstain? May we suggest that the Rechabites were set before Israel as an example of faithful obedience because they were willing to obey, regardless of the circumstances that surrounded them. Cast in the mold of men like Daniel, and the three Hebrew children who refused to compromise the truth in the face of mitigating circumstances, these Rechabites chose commitment above compromise, and obedience rather than obstanancy.

Second, **the Rechabites were obedient because they respected**

the **COMMAND** given by their fathers. The command was *personal, plain, prohibitive, and productive*. There was nothing difficult to understand in the command, nor in the personal application of that command. One of the reasons why men do not obey the Lord today is because they take what God considers a *command* and they treat it as an *option*. If you doubt this, consider the simple command that we “forsake not the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25). There are very few, if any, congregations that are not plagued with the wide chasm separating the attendance figures on Sunday morning and Sunday evening. Such individuals who habitually miss Sunday evening and/or Wednesday night have relegated a command of God to a matter of choice.

Third, the **Rechabites were obedient because they were COMMITTED**. They were united in their devotion to God and realized the importance of teaching their families the same kind of commitment and dedication (v.8). Note the extent of their commitment from this verse. 1) They obeyed ALL that their father commanded; 2) they obeyed the command for ALL of their life; 3) they taught it to ALL their descendants.

Fourth, the **Rechabites were obedient because they realized there were CONSEQUENCES associated with their actions**. In her disobedience, Judah would face punishment; but the Rechabites, because of their example of obedience, “shall not want a man to stand before me [God, TW] for ever” (v.19). The foolish man seeks to excuse himself for his actions, deceiving himself into believing that what he sows, he will NOT reap; but the wise man knows that what he sows he SHALL reap (Gal. 6:7-8). Therein lies the difference between the obedient Rechabites and disobedient Judah.

My friend, will you not obey your Master TODAY? Seek to have the heart of these amazing Rechabites. I will close with the following poem. I know not the author, but it’s message is clear:

Tomorrow

“Tomorrow,” he promised his conscience;
 “Tomorrow I mean to believe;
 Tomorrow I’ll think as I ought to;
 Tomorrow my Saviour receive.
 Tomorrow my Saviour receive.
 Tomorrow I’ll conquer the habits

That hold one from heaven away.”
 But never his conscience repeated one word,
 And only one word, “Today.”

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow —
 Thus day after day it went on;
 Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow —
 Till youth like vision was gone.
 Till age and his passions had written
 The message of fate on his brow;
 And forth from the shadows came
 Death,
 With the pitiless syllable, “Now!”

“What will you do with Jesus?”
 The question comes low and clear;
 The solemn words are sounding
 Now in your listening ear.
 Immortal life’s in the question
 And joy through eternity.
 Then what will you do with Jesus?

What will your answer be?
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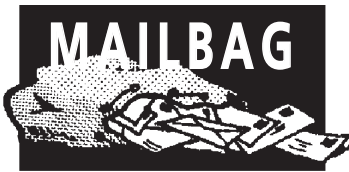
(Continued from page 1)

and services to the highest public bidders. Elders of loyal churches, small and large, destitute and affluent, never think once to have a church sponsored yard sale and to publicize its proceeds to compensate for a mission trip or support a home for orphans. Faithful Christians dig down deep in their pockets, oftentimes to the detriment of themselves, to support homes for orphans, preaching schools, missionaries and other good works. They know they can call on sister churches and trust their willingness, too, to support scriptural brotherhood projects.

In every unwise, uncalled-for action done in the name of Christ is the failure to comprehend the authority which Christ has (Col. 3:17). Here is some scriptural advice for the church which finds itself agonizing for added money: 1) Do not obligate finances to works until those finances are in-hand, 2) Work harder to save money and contribute to desired works later, 3) Request help from sister congregations to alleviate the costly burden (cf. Gal. 6:2).

While many churches have heard complaints from good brethren about poor fund-collecting tactics and continue with no regard, there are some whose leaders simply have never thought about the negative influence it has upon Christ, the church and the community. Jerusalem saints sold items to supply one another (Acts 2:45), but the indication is that they did so individually — not under a great big sign reading “Church Yard Sale: Help Us Take Care of Needy Christians because We Can’t Do it Ourselves.” Call it tact. Call it being “above reproach.” Call it “doing Bible things in Bible ways.” No matter how viewed, if members of the church give on the first day of every week cheerfully, and if the church does not frivolously waste its money, there will be no temptation to do those things (fund raisers) which have no Bible authority behind them.

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

"I would greatly appreciate you sending me the monthly publication of *Seek The Old Paths*. Also, if you have any 2005 and 2006 back issues, I would appreciate receiving them" ...**Polly Johnson, Franklin, TN.** [NOTE: We do keep a supply of back issues on hand. We are happy to send them to you. —editor, gmr]. "Hold fast to the Lord" ...**L. S.**

Parry, Livonia, MI. "Enclosed please find my check to help with the publishing of *Seek The Old Paths*. It is an excellent paper and does a great job of defending the Truth. Best wishes" ...**V. Glenn McCoy, Yorba Linda, CA.** "Thank you for your previous *Seek The Old Paths* issues. Due to health reasons we have had to move to Mississippi to be near our daughter. Thank you. God bless" ...**Dewey & Dot Medlin, Columbus, MS.** "Thank you so much for sending me the paper from the East End church of Christ. I read every one and pass it on to others for a return back to me. I look forward to receiving others in the future. I enjoy reading them" ...**Danny Vaughn, Maury City, TN.** "You continue to do an excellent job with *Seek The Old Paths* and the influence of this paper continues to be felt" ...**Bob Spurlin, Hartselle, AL.** "I thank you so much for your work and for your love of the scripture I thank our Lord" ...**Peggy Wright.** "I was given one of your articles on 'Repentance, A Condition For Salvation.' I would like to receive any material you've got. It's very good" ...**Terrell Pitts, Pulaski, TN.** "Thanks for sending me your *Seek The Old Paths*" ...**Bill Prather, Odessa, TX.** "A friend shared your *Seek The Old Paths* publication and I have been reading them ever since then. I have saved them all even the old ones from your web page and really enjoy them. I have been with a congregation that has been flirting with Liberalism or Unity/Diversity. It's quite sad as I finally had to worship in another location where they are teaching the truth. Keep up the good work, I'll be checking back soon hoping you guys will post the September issue soon. Thanks" ...**Gary.** "I appreciate your paper and the website" ...**Don Tabet, Denison, TX.** "I want to say to you how much I enjoy reading *Seek The Old Paths*. It is one of the most conservative papers in the brotherhood. I am the new minister here at the McCreary church of Christ in Whitley City, Kentucky. The church almost closed its doors about six months ago. But I moved here the 1st of November to start helping them get it back together. They used to have about 23-30 members. Right now, our prayers are to increase our attendance in one year to 20. We have already started visiting those that have quit coming. We hope and pray all will come back. I would love to send you some money to help on finances but unable at this time. We are getting outside support but hope and pray we can change that within three years. I made a three year commitment. The brethren are happy we are here and we are well. This is what I have been doing after my retirement. So please send us about 12 copies of *Seek The Old Paths*. It will be greatly used" ...**Joe Arnold, Whitley City, KY.** [NOTE: We pray you will continue to work with the brethren there and be able to build them up. We have put you on the mailing list to receive 10 copies each month. We mail in bundles of 10. When you find you need 20, we'll be glad to send an extra bundle your way. Thanks for your good note. —editor, gmr] "Thanks lots! Keep up the good work" ...**Jimmy Canup, Fries, VA.** "Just a little something to help out on your wonderful paper. I would like to remain anonymous" ...**McMinnville, TN.** "I receive and share this news with others. Betty Chafin of Bluefield, WV said, 'I wish there were more papers like this. I receive the paper from the Merkel church of Christ in Merkel Texas.' I believe this is one way to help each other and the world...we that receive *Seek The Old Paths* share it with others. I really do not know who sent this paper to me. I just thank my God I receive it. Continue in this good work and may God bless you" ...**Georgia Evans, Big Sandy, TN.** "The whole truth and nothing but the truth is being preached where we worship and has made some feel guilty, so they moved on to a 'church' where their ears are being tickled once again. They are working on enticing others away from us. There are other much larger congregations in our area where the parties, trips and sports programs are drawing people like bees to honey. The gospel is not being preached, but the fun is!" ...**Anonymous.** [NOTE: It is so sad that brethren do not want the truth. But, that is what the Bible tells us has happened and will happen again and again. So many want their ears tickled just as you've stated. Sadly, many churches are doing exact-

ly that and don't even know it. They content themselves by thinking that since they wear the name 'church of Christ' they are all right. They never stop to ask for a 'thus saith the Lord.' When will they wake up and follow the 'right way?' Our prayers are with you and we're thankful you have a preacher that stands in the 'old paths' and proclaims the 'whole counsel of God.' May the number like him be multiplied. —editor, gmr] "Keep preaching the word in it fullness. We are so uplifted by your lessons" ...**Barbara Farley & Lu Ella Fallier, Arkansas City, KS.** "Thanks for sending me the paper" ...**Florice Cardwell, Oxford, MS.** "Thank you for all that you do for the Lord. May our God continue to bless you richly according to His good will" ...**Jimmie B. Hill, Dacula, GA.** "I want to wish you a happy holiday season. I pray your health is good and you have many years to continue the Lord's work with your great publication of *Seek The Old Paths*. I thank you for sending me the publication for the Morning Glory church at Gardendale. By handing them out, I can encourage people to read them. This is such a good work and exposes error that some brethren don't realize exists. Our fault today is not reading and not knowing the error that is so rampant in the Lord's church today" ...**Ed Armstrong, Pecos, TX.** [NOTE: Thanks brother Armstrong for your encouraging words. We thank everyone who takes the time to write and help hold up our hands. It is true that so many are traveling down the liberal road and don't even know it. Our job is to keep on teaching and preaching and calling people's attention to the old paths. —editor, gmr] "I enjoy the little newsletter. I am sending a support check to help with expenses. Would you please add my brother to your mailing list. Thank you very much" ...**Archie Ristine, Ellensburg, WA.** "I enjoyed your publication through out the year so much. I'd like to renew it for me for the year of 2007. I've included a little extra so your publication expenses and your desire to reach the lost will continue on in your firm commitment of standing for the truth. Thank you" ...**Randall Gruenewald, Salinas, CA.**

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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