



# 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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## WHY IS THERE SO MUCH BITTERNESS?

Roger D. Campbell

***Bitter food is one thing; but a bitter spirit that eats at the soul and spews forth cutting, hateful words is another matter entirely.***

**W**hen you think about something tasting bitter, what comes to mind? An unpleasant taste? No doubt. A cutting feeling on the tongue? Most likely. A bitter-tasting object can cause a person's tongue, mouth, face, and even entire body to twist, shake, and recoil in response to it. It is sometimes comical to watch such a reaction when unsuspecting souls bite into a food item from which they did not anticipate a bitter taste. Small children can be a riot to watch do so.

There is nothing comical, however, about a scene in which children of God demonstrate a bitter spirit towards God or their fellow man. Bitter food is one thing; but a bitter spirit that eats at the soul and spews forth cutting, hateful words is another matter entirely.

Since Jesus said, “*Ye shall know them by their fruits*” (Matt. 7:16), we would do well to consider some of the consequences or fallouts that come about due to bitterness. They are not pretty. Hopefully, the ugliness of them will catch our attention and cause us to be determined to work diligently to keep bitterness from taking root in our hearts.

### WHAT DOES BITTERNESS DO?

**Bitterness troubles.** That is what Hebrews 12:14 teaches. “*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the*

grace of God; lest any *root of bitterness* springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Bitterness stirs up trouble. If Satan cannot get us to fall for false teaching or give in to the pull of immoral conduct, he will take a crack at bringing us down with a bitter spirit. Marriages, friendships and elderships have crashed due to bitterness robbing people of their joy, rational thinking, and peaceful demeanor. Let's face it: some people have “bitter breath.” I do not mean they have a foul odor, but rather the words that spring forth from their mouth are full of bitterness. James asked, “*Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter*” (James 3:11)? The answer is obvious. Just before that, James had made these two declarations: “*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be*” (3:10).

The point? Christians need to remove bitter speech from their vocabulary. That means, of course, that we must first remove any bitter spirit from our hearts. Make no mistake about it: a heart filled with bitterness causes big trouble, some of which is undoable.

**Bitterness defiles.** We see this truth in the latter part of Hebrews 12:15: “*...lest any root of bitterness* springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Many would be

quick to point out how horrific murder, adultery, and idolatry are. Yet, a bitter disposition is sometimes passed off as, “That's just the way he/she is.” If “the way he/she is” means that he/she is a bitter grump, then he/she needs to have a serious change of heart and repent! The same Lord that tells us to avoid murder, adultery and idolatry also charges us, “*Let all bitterness...be put away from you...*” (Eph. 4:32). God knows what you and I need to understand and admit: bitterness defiles the soul.

**Bitterness divides.** A bitter spirit gets in the way of obeying the Lord's instruction to “*follow peace with all men*” (Heb. 12:14). There surely was a good reason for God saying, “*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them*” (Col. 3:19), don't you think? Bitterness can turn the best of friends into permanent enemies, drive happily-married couples to divorce court, and spark a civil war within what was once a stable, solid, and contented congregation. Satan must watch with glee as bitterness leads to turmoil within families and God's church.

**Bitterness damns.** Quite simply, if God tells me to put away bitterness, and yet I do not do it (Eph. 4:32), then my sin of bitterness will

*(Continued on page 7)*  
**Bitterness...**



Editorial...

## LESSONS TO LEARN FROM JONAH

Garland M. Robinson

### **You can't run away or hide from God.**

Jonah did his best to run away from God and escape the responsibility of going to Nineveh. *"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD"* (Jonah 1:3). Tarshish was in far away Spain. It was as far away as you could possibly go. Nineveh was to the East, Tarshish was to the West.

There is no place in the entire universe that one can hide from God. The Psalmist said, *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee"* (Psalm 139:7-12).

Jesus said the prodigal son gathered all his "stuff" together and made his journey to a "far country" (Luke 15:13). He wanted to get as far away from home as he possibly could. He wanted to go where no one knew him — where no one would remind him of his good home and loving father. He had to hit rock bottom before he realized what he had left behind. When he came to his senses, he humbled himself and returned home. When Jonah came to his senses, he did that which he should have done at the beginning.

**Proper fear will cause one to reverence God.**

At first, Jonah feared God, but ran away from his responsibility. But then later, his fear caused him to humble himself before God. *"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. ... But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD"* (Jonah 2:4,9).

The mariners on board the boat were moved by the fear of the Lord. *"Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows"* (Jonah 1:16).

When the children of Israel went in to possess the land of Canaan, they were given warning. *"Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged"* (Deut. 6:1-2).

Notice these many verses that tell us about the fear of the Lord. Psalm 2:11, *"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling."* Psalm 19:9, *"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether."* Psalm 22:23, *"Ye that fear the LORD, praise him...."* Psalm 33:8, *"Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."* Psalm 34:9, *"O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."* Psalm 111:10, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever."* Psalm 115:11, *"Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and*

*their shield."* Psalm 115:13, *"He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great."* Psalm 147:11, *"The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."* Prov. 1:7, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."* Prov. 2:5, *"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."* Prov. 3:7, *"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil."* Prov. 8:13, *"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."* Prov. 9:10, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."* Prov. 10:27, *"The fear of the LORD prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened."* Prov. 14:26, *"In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge."* Prov. 14:27, *"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."* Prov. 15:16, *"Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith."* Prov. 15:33, *"The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."* Prov. 16:6, *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."*

**There's no substitute for preaching the whole counsel of God.**

Jonah did not spare! He told it like it was. I've always appreciated his words recorded in chapter three and verse four, **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"**

Isaiah proclaimed, *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins"* (Isa. 58:1).

Jeremiah was told, *"...thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. 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, to build, and to plant. ... Thou therefore*

*gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee. Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem...*" (Jer. 1:7-10, 17-19, 2:2).

Since we did not "write the book" (the Bible), we have no privilege or license to alter the message in any way. We must not "add to" nor "take from." Severe and strict warning is given for doing so. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

Paul had no regrets regarding his two years of preaching while in the region of Ephesus and Asia Minor (cf. Acts 19:1-10). Years later, when passing through that area again, he told the elders of the church in Ephesus, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). He had kept back nothing that was spiritually profitable to them (Acts 20:20).

The early church prayed for strength and boldness to preach the word without fear or favor. When Peter and John were released from the custody of the priests and Sadducees in Jerusalem, they gathered with the brethren and prayed, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (Acts 4:29).

While in Corinth, Paul announced that their blood was upon their own heads and that he was cleared from responsibility because he had preached all that he had been

commanded (Acts 18:6). He later wrote unto them saying, "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God..." (2 Cor. 2:17). He would always tell the truth, even if it made enemies with some (Gal. 4:16).

Paul exhorted Timothy to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

**God will forgive those who repent.**

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). The king made a decree saying, "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:8-10).

God will pardon those who turn to him in humbleness and repentance. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). God is not willing that any should perish in their sins, but he desires that all repent and turn to him for forgiveness (1 Peter 3:9).

"...Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

The message of John, Jesus and the apostles was repentance for the remission of sins. "John did baptize

*in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). The first sermon ever preached declared, "...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). **Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Jesus and water baptism** brings God's forgiveness (Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:6; Acts 17:30; 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 22:16; Rom. 6:6,18; 1 Peter 3:21).*

**Rejoice when sinners repent.**

It is sad indeed that when the people of Nineveh repented, Jonah was not thankful and thereby give praise and glory to God for it. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (Jonah 4:1). He wanted them to pay for their evil. He could not stand for them to be forgiven.

Woe to any and all who are not thankful when sinners turn to God! "I say unto you, that...joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. ... I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:7,10).

We should rejoice when even our enemies repent and turn to the Lord. What a merciful God we serve!

Other obvious lessons we can learn from the account of Jonah are these: (1) When God calls for repentance, we better listen. God "...commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). (2) There is no detour in following God's commands. "...What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8) (3) God desires obedience, not lip service. "...To obey [is] better than sacrifice, [and] to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). (4) Hatred keeps one from following God. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: ...no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). (5) Pride will keep one from following God. "Pride [goeth] before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). (6) God's plans cannot be thwarted. God said, "I will hasten my word to perform it" (Jer. 1:12).

# Elder's COLUMN

## RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD ELDERS #3

Stephen Wiggins

***It takes spiritual fortitude, great courage, and a resolve to obey God at all cost to rebuke a sinning elder in public. Yet God requires it because the holiness and purity of the church must be upheld.***

**E**ven the least informed among us surely possess some grasp as to the significance of elders in the Lord's church. One would be hard pressed to read the New Testament without at least appreciating that elders exist in the church because of God's divine design. Their appointed function to "take care" (1 Tim. 3:4) of the church makes them indispensable to the spiritual welfare of God's people. The Master knows the benefits received by the redeemed when overseen by qualified leaders. Thus, the faithful child of God considers it a privilege to remain under the oversight of elders knowing that this harmonizes with the divine prescription.

The focus in this series of articles centers upon, not what elders can do for the congregation, but rather what the local church can do for elders. There are duties and responsibilities the congregation has toward its overseers. This involves both attitudes and actions which God expects his people to exhibit toward their leaders. The question posed is, "what does God's word teach about how the church should treat elders?" The Bible answers this in clear and unambiguous language.

The third and final passage to be considered in this series is 1 Timothy 5:17-22. From it we glean five responsibilities that every congregation of the Lord's people has in this matter. *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his hire. Against an elder receive not an accusation, except at the mouth of two or*

*three witnesses. Them that sin reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear. I charge thee in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure"* (ASV).

The term "elder" (*presbyteros*) and its cognates have different usages in the New Testament. For example, sometimes it refers to a person of advanced age. Earlier in this chapter Paul uses the same term in reference to *elderly* men and women in contrast to younger men (vs.1-2). In another sense, however, the term takes on an official connotation wherein "elders" have met certain qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and therefore "appointed" (Acts 14:23) to function in a leadership capacity of the congregation (BDAG, 862). They "rule" over the local church in the sense that they direct the spiritual affairs of the congregation (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:5). In this more technical sense, biblical authors mention the "elders of the church" (Acts 20:17; James 5:14) or "the presbytery" ("the eldership," NKJV; 1 Tim. 4:14). Contextual considerations of the passage under discussion assure the interpreter that Paul refers to "elders" in this official capacity.

### I. APPRECIATION (vs.17-18)

Paul states that elders who "rule well" should be "counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching." The phrase "counted worthy" translates a single term. It means *deserv-*

*ing* in the sense of having a high degree of merit or worth as it pertains to one's value (BDAG, 94; Louw/Nida, 622). The imperative form sets forth a command whereby God (through the author) imposes his will upon the church. God commands the church to regard her elders with deep appreciation for who they are and what they do on behalf of God's kingdom. Don't allow the English translation to cause one to suppose that the apostle offers a mere suggestion. On the surface it may seem to relate a permissive concept (*"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy..."*). In the absence of any third person imperative in the English, the full force of the command often gets obscured in translation. But no permissive or weak suggestion inheres in the grammatical construction (Wallace, 486). This equals a divine obligation. God commands that every elder who fulfills his responsibilities as a shepherd over God's flock *must* be considered deserving and worthy of appreciation from the members of the local congregation.

Whereas all elders who faithfully serve are deserving of esteem, there are some who rule "well" (i.e., *with proficiency and a high standard of excellence*; BDAG, 505) who are worthy of "double honor." In this context the term "honor" includes financial compensation in the sense of *honorarium* (BDAG, 1005). This remuneration remains one of the ways that appreciation and respect may be exhibited to elders, and "especially" toward those who "labor" (i.e., *toil to the point of weariness*; Vine, 121) in teaching and preaching God's word. Contextually, there are two reasons why *honor* includes monetary sup-

port. First, a verbal form of the same word occurs earlier in this chapter relating how the church should “Honor widows that are widows indeed” (5:3). This encompasses providing financial support for those widows who are truly destitute (5:4,8,16). Second, Paul immediately substantiates this principle of monetary support by two quotations from scripture. Both passages describe, in a positive way, that the one who labors in the spiritual realm deserves compensation - “*Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn*” (Deut. 25:4); and again, “*The laborer is worthy of his hire*” (Luke 10:7). The twofold honor deserving of elders, then, involves not only that respect which accompanies the responsible overseer, but also ample provisions by way of financial support (Collins, 144).

## II. CONFIDENCE (v.19)

The apostle instructs, “*Against an elder receive not an accusation, except at the mouth of two or three witnesses.*” Paul employs another imperative preceded by a negative particle which relates a negative command or prohibition — “*Don’t receive...*” The term “receive” means to *acknowledge something to be correct or to believe something to be true* (BDAG, 761; Louw/Nida, 372). God forbids one to acknowledge, as credible, allegations against an elder. The elder must be given the benefit of the doubt as to his innocence and upright character. Because of their position of leadership, elders are more susceptible to misrepresentations and accusations than anyone in the kingdom. As leaders of God’s people, they are vulnerable to scrutiny, slander, and unjust criticisms from adversaries. Enemies of the Gospel who despise the truth and resent the Lord’s church are often eager to falsely accuse her leaders and engage in smear campaigns. God wants godly leaders of his church safeguarded from capricious, irresponsible, and unfounded accusations. This prohibition, then, offers a measure of protection against unsubstantiated charges made against public leaders of the church by disgruntled members or false teachers.

At the same time, God does *not* prescribe a mandate which allows

elders guilty of sin to continue unchecked in some ethical breach or doctrinal aberration. This text does *not* categorically prohibit one from making or receiving an accusation against an elder. There exists circumstances under which an accusation *must* seriously be considered and not dismissed. The accusation ultimately might prove false, yet still it should be investigated. Before considering any allegation against an elder, it must be substantiated “on the basis of” (i.e., “*on the evidence of,*” BDAG, 365) multiple witnesses. This Old Testament principle operates on the presumption that there exists credibility and corroboration of truth in a plurality of witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. Matt. 18:15-17). It insures justice and hopefully deters trivial and false charges which would damage anyone’s reputation. Thus, one may make or receive an accusation against an elder, with God’s approval, when done on the basis of multiple and credible witnesses. In fact, any member of the church may find themselves ‘duty bound’ to bring a legitimate accusation against an elder for the overall benefit of the church and the bishop involved. If so, it should be done with the assurance that one is acting in harmony with God’s prescribed mode of operation. I repeat: This inspired mandate does *not* intend to make elders immune to any legitimate accusation, but rather to shelter them from illegitimate and unsubstantiated charges. The point remains that there should be an element of trust and confidence exhibited on the part of all Christians toward elders, even in the face of allegations. Christians must be ready to disregard any *unsupported* accusations in the absence of multiple witnesses.

## III. CORRECTION (v.20)

From the preceding, one learns that when charges are brought against an elder by credible witnesses, an investigation of the allegations *must* occur. If upon inquiry brethren find the elder innocent, resulting in vindication of his character, the congregation presumably would be informed. It may be further presumed that the elder would continue to serve as an overseer with full confidence of the brethren since the

charges against him were found false. But if brethren find him guilty, then the problem must be dealt with for the benefit of the elder and those among God’s people who may have been negatively influenced. Thus, the apostle directs, “*Them that sin, reprove in the sight of all, that the rest also may be in fear.*” The phrase “them that sin” translates a present participle. The *present* tense relates a continuous activity of sin. This linear aspect guarantees that Paul discusses an elder living a life of ongoing sin; or, it may highlight a constant state of guilt in the absence of his repentance, even though the transgression was a one-time occurrence (Knight, 236). Some translations attempt to reflect this progressive nuance (e.g., “those who continue in sin,” NASB; “those who persist in sin,” ESV).

Another imperative articulates the command to “reprove” those elders involved in sin. Brethren obey this injunction by expressing strong disapproval of someone’s wrong actions in an attempt to *correct* them (BDAG, 315; Louw/Nida, 436). It involves the concept of exposing to someone their sin and summoning them to repentance (TDNT, 2:474). The verb’s *present* tense parallels the same continuous aspect as the preceding participle. Paul commands brethren to habitually reprimand those in the habit of living in sin (Mounce, 312). The apostle states why there must be a public rebuke of the elder found guilty of the charges of sin — *that it may have a positive influence on others*. The confrontation must take place before “all” (i.e., publicly before the congregation) that “the rest” (i.e., the other elders and brethren generally) may “also” possess that reverential fear which will motivate them to avoid similar sinful behavior.

Public censure of sin should always be considered a remedial effort. The public reprimand intends to induce repentance and restoration on the part of the elder along with curtailing any negative influence exerted on members of the flock. The design seeks to instill within God’s people a deterrence to sin. It might be further noted that when an elder is found guilty of sinful activities, he should be formally removed from his leadership role. God does not grant a defective leader a license to continue

in unrestrained fashion with no remedy available to the church (Jackson, 152-153). It takes spiritual fortitude, great courage, and a resolve to obey God at all cost to rebuke a sinning elder in public. Yet God requires it because the holiness and purity of the church must be upheld. If public exposure of sin seems harsh to the modern day Christian who is overly concerned about a politically correct and polite society, just remember that the spiritual welfare of an entire congregation may be jeopardized because one of her leaders has fallen into sin. This disciplinary procedure seeks to result in the restoration of a lost soul and promote the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Because of the gravity of the situation and the seriousness of the consequences which follow, God commands that we must be willing to offer *correction* to those elders who persist in sin.

#### IV. FAIRNESS (v.21)

The apostle issues this “charge” in the presence of God, Christ, and the elect angels that one “observe these things” without “prejudice” or “partiality.” The term translated “charge” signifies a strong expression stated in such a way that the recipient is to be impressed with its seriousness. It means to exhort with authority in matters of extraordinary importance and, as here, frequently used with reference to an appeal to higher, divine powers (BDAG, 233). In short, it equals an apostolic command. It is an emphatic demand or affirmation with God, Christ, and the elect angels acting as witnesses. The solemnity of this charge shows the seriousness and earnestness of Paul’s feeling on the subject (cf. “I solemnly charge you...;” NASB). The gravity of the situation should not be missed. The purity of the church and her leadership is of the deepest concern to the apostle (Barrett, 80). Paul wants one to know that the Father, the Son, and the angelic hosts are watching (“in the sight of”). This serves to remind one that all live and act in the very presence of God who sees and knows all we do and even the very motive for which we do it. The Father, his Son, and the angels are the ones brethren should be concerned about and not fickle men who may oppose doing what is right. The

church which tolerates sinning elders to protect its “reputation” within the community will lose respect in heaven (MacArthur, 223-224).

The “these things” (i.e., instructions given in verses 17-20) are to be done (“observed”) in view of two negatives — without “prejudice” and “partiality.” The apostle’s directives were to be carried out without bias or favoritism. The terms stress objectivity. The apostle is issuing a caution to those who might be tempted to abuse the previous instruction pertaining to the disciplinary procedure. One must administer justice toward an elder without pre-judging the case. The caution is to deal with such matters in the most judicious way possible. There must be no preferential treatment toward the wealthy, the educated, or the popular. Impartiality will ensure both a just evaluation of the allegations against an elder and the consistent application of discipline. No one was to allow their personal prejudices to tip the scales of justice when disciplining an elder. All things must be discharged with absolute fairness, accuracy, integrity, and without any taint of injustice. There must be no discrimination, no predetermination of either guilt or innocence. Paul argues *not* for special treatment toward elders other than the fairness any judicial procedure would demand. What he does demand is protection from *unfair* treatment in disciplinary procedures and protection from capricious accusations toward elders.

#### V. CAUTION (v.22)

The restrictive to “lay hands suddenly on no man” refers to the process of appointing men as elders. Within the biblical context, the imposition of hands served several purposes. One was to formally set apart certain ones for a specific commission or service (Acts 13:2-3; cf. 1 Tim. 4:14). The practice has its roots in the Old Testament (Num. 8:10; 27:18-23; Deut. 34:9). In this particular context, Paul is relating what the congregation is *not* to do when publicly affirming a man’s suitability for and acceptance into the eldership. A negative particle precedes the imperative “lay” turning the command into a strong prohibition. The apostle demands that something should

never be done. The key term is the adverb “suddenly” by which Paul remonstratively urges the brethren not to do something *too quickly* (BDAG, 992). The idea is that brethren must never hurriedly make choices in their evaluation and appointment of men to the role of elders. The ordaining of elders to the role of oversight in the local congregation should not be a hasty process. Rather cautious deliberation should characterize the congregation in the selection of her leaders. This is a significant obligation that brethren today would do well to heed.

Brethren may not have given much thought to the fact that they are disobeying a command of God by rushing through the process of appointing elders. Nor perhaps have brethren considered the fact that they are culpable for ungodly actions on the part of those elders whom they appointed but were never qualified in the first place. This is what Paul alludes to when in the next phrase he states, “*neither be a partaker of other men’s sins.*” Again, the negative particle coupled with the imperative (“don’t be a partaker!”) strictly prohibits association or participation whereby one becomes “equally responsible” for the actions of a rogue elder (BDAG, 552). Hastily appointing elders who later bring reproach on the church equals an act of irresponsibility whereby blame is imputed to those who elevated him to the position of a leader. As one brother aptly expresses it, “If an unqualified man is placed into the eldership, and harm results to the cause of Christ, surely there will be culpability on the part of those who rush the inept person into his position of authority and leadership” (155). The process of selecting elders involves risks. Thus, the apostle commands *caution* and thoroughness so that men of proven character may be chosen to function as overseers. When brethren fulfill this apostolic injunction, future problems within the church will be minimized.

For a list of Sources in writing this article, see: [seektheoldpaths.com/stop112.htm#SOUR](http://seektheoldpaths.com/stop112.htm#SOUR)

105 East Planters  
San Augustine, TX 75972

# TEACHERS NEEDED TO HELP BIBLE STUDENTS AROUND THE WORLD

**International Bible Teaching Ministries** is in need of faithful Christians to help in our Bible Correspondence Course program. Currently, we have over 2,000 students from over 100 nations and would like to expand even more if we have enough teachers to handle the load. Students go to our web site at [www.IBTMinistries.org](http://www.IBTMinistries.org) and enroll in our courses. They read the material and answer the questions. We then send their answers to our teachers (via email) who grade them and send them back to the students by email. We have over 80 Bible Study courses that are all done 'on-line'. Nothing is done through the Post Office so you don't have to have envelopes or stamps. However, you do have to have a computer, internet access and the ability to send and receive email. All teachers are asked to fill out a doctrinal questionnaire before being allowed to work with our program. There is a web page where our teachers are given 'grading keys'. Our web site also contains a lot of other helpful material for teachers to use. We are growing very fast. Our classes have only been online for about a year. There have been two baptisms that have been reported to us as a result of these courses. Please visit [www.IBTMinistries.org](http://www.IBTMinistries.org) to see what we have to offer. If you would be willing to be a volunteer teacher in grading these lessons and sending them back to the students, please email us at [info@IBTMinistries.org](mailto:info@IBTMinistries.org) and ask us about it. Each teacher is given about 15 students. We look forward to hearing from you.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

Ron D. Gilbert  
PO Box 49494  
Cookeville, TN 38506

[NOTE: This program of study has my support. I would not include it in STOP unless it were worthy. If you will, please help spread the Gospel by being a teacher 'on-line.' Tell other faithful Christians about it too. — Editor, Garland Robinson]

# CONTRIBUTIONS

Don Smith.....	\$1
Don Smith.....	\$2
Anonymous.....	\$50
Ernest & Sandra Armstrong.....	\$500
Anonymous.....	\$15
Ruby York (given before her passing) .....	\$200
Anonymous.....	\$75
Joe C. Turbeville.....	\$11
Everett D. Poteet.....	\$50
Marvin & Judy Gearhart .....	\$25
North Pickins C/C, Reform, AL.....	\$25
Robert Villegas .....	\$15
Anonymous.....	\$200
Broadway C/C, Rockford, IL.....	\$50
Flora Mae Webb .....	\$20
Frank D. Coppedge .....	\$25
Anonymous.....	\$15
Willene E. Sullivan .....	\$25
Baker C/C, Baker, FL.....	\$25
Oleta Trigg.....	\$25
West Road C/C, Mountain Home, AR.....	\$200
Harold V. Hopkins .....	\$50
Jack & Thelma Blake .....	\$50
Ivory & Cynthia M. McIntyre .....	\$100
Linda Nowlin & Dar Heidbrink (in Memory of Ruby York).....	\$50
Anonymous.....	\$250
Michael R. Ivey.....	\$25
Anonymous.....	\$50
Robert M. Price .....	\$200
Robert M. Price .....	\$200
Arlington C/C, McMinnville, TN.....	\$50
Robert & Johnnie Tittle.....	\$382
Everett & Colleen Anderson .....	\$50
Chuck & Nancy Verkist.....	\$25
Midland C/C, Midland, MI .....	\$200
Clear Creek C/C, Corinth, MS .....	\$100
Bobby & Mary Lawrence.....	\$100
St. Clair C/C, St. Clair, MI.....	\$360
Beginning Balance.....	\$5,103.77
Contributions.....	\$3,796.00
Debits	
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Supplies.....	\$326.97
Repairs .....	\$286.20
Ending Balance.....	\$6,523.68

NOTE: Our bookletmaker (folder/stapler) broke down before we finished the December issue which caused nearly half of the mailing to be late. We apologize for the delay, but it was beyond our control. As of this writing, it is still in a repair shop in Nashville. I have no idea what it will cost. We were able to get a "loaner" machine, but it is very slow going and labor intensive compared to what we're used to. I've been able to handle all the maintenance on the equipment up to this point, but this one was beyond what I could diagnose, even with the help of company techs on the phone. Then, we began to have trouble with the printer and thought for a while I might not be able to get it going. But, I finally found the problem and its up and running again. It's sure nice when

everything is working as designed. It's a lot of work even then, but it is a labor of love. The amount of mail and calls we receive encouraging us in the work is overwhelming. I so very much appreciate your faith, prayers and support.

God designed man to serve and worship Him, but gives him a choice whether to do it or not. What a tragedy that the vast majority choose to "break down" and not function as they were designed. Faithful Christians are continually working on sinners and backsliders to repent and obey the Lord. We have the perfect tool with which to do our work, the inspired Scriptures. "For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12-13). It's our job to teach and preach the Gospel throughout the whole world as long as the earth stands. To that end, we will continue to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). We will hopefully be up and running at full capacity before long.

Editor, Garland Robinson

## Bitterness...

(Continued from page 1)

keep me separated from Him and thereby keep me in a lost state. Back again to Hebrews 12:15, we see that the bitterness which troubles and defiles a person causes him/her to fail or fall short of the grace of God. No wonder the Holy Spirit exhorts Christians to look diligently lest bitterness spring up in our hearts (Heb. 12:15)!

A bitter disposition and bitter tongue do not jive with being a child of the living God. As we have seen, *bitterness troubles, defiles, divides, and damns*. Those truths get my attention. Do they get yours? Because "the heart knoweth his own bitterness" (Prov. 14:10), let each one of us look into his/her own heart, do some self-analyzing, and if bitterness be found, get rid of it.

120 Will Lewis Dr. SE  
Cleveland, TN 37323



## SEEK THE OLD PATHS

5306 Gant Road, Baxter, TN 38544” ...**Garland Robinson, editor.** “The **CHURCH OF CHRIST in Doyle, Tennessee**, is in need of a preacher. Average attendance is about 80. If interested, send resume to **Doyle Church of Christ, PO Box 218, Doyle, TN 38559** or email at **doylepreachersearch@yahoo.com**” ...**Doyle Church of Christ.** “The **LEAKESVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST** in Leakesville, Mississippi, is in need of a Gospel preacher. The Sunday morning attendance is about 25-30. We would very much like for someone to work with us. We can furnish a house and utilities. If you are interested or know someone who is, please contact **Ronald Byrd** at 601-394-9565 (cowladygb@tds.net) or **22960 Hwy 42, Richton, MS 39476**” ...**Leakesville Church Of Christ.** “Please accept this donation in loving memory of our aunt **Ruby York**” ...**Linda Nowlin & Dar Heidbrink, Memphis, TN.** “I haven’t written you good people or donated anything to help with postage lately. So I am sending you a small donation. May God bless you all always. Keep up the great work. Love always” ...**Everett Poteet, Imboden, AR.** (NOTE: Many write saying they are sending a small donation. We greatly appreciate your help in this great work. However, we want everyone to know, no donation is small. Your heart is big and your support is great. Without each one of you, this work would not be possible. It is a work of love for the greatest cause the world has ever known. It seems that just when one of our machines breaks, brethren step up to fill the gap. Our printer has just tripped 5 million copies and our folder/booklet maker has many more million copies on it. As of this writing, it is broken down. But hopefully, we’ll be up and running again by the time you get this issue. Thanks to each one who helps with your prayers and financial support in this great work” ...**Editor, gmr.**) “I have a request for encouragement for a new brother in Christ. He is incarcerated along with me. I’ve known him for about four or five years and after working with him for quite some time, he finally started studying the Scriptures. When I met him he had a skin condition (psoriasis) and over these years it has progressively gotten worse. It is going to his joints and arthritis is setting in. It’s so bad he can hardly walk. When he sits down he can hardly get back up. His arms, hands, feet and ankles swell up on a regular basis. He is 39 years old. He’s been incarcerated for about 16 years and with a sentence of 50 years to life, it is almost certain he’ll never make it out of here in this life. But he has the heart of a child and would give to help anyone. On December 4, 2011, the angles in heaven were rejoicing at the addition of a new brother in Christ through baptism into Christ’s death and raised to walk in newness of life. It is sad now watching my brother in Christ suffer and knowing the probability of him never making it out of here. I’m writing to see if it would be okay, and if there’s nothing scripturally barring, if you would ask the members of your congregation if they would send a letter of encouragement to him (brother Brian Kearns). And if you think it would be okay, maybe you could print this in the mailbag section of STOP so that others could give him encouragement as well. If there’s any hesitation over using your return address, an alternative is to use the congregation’s address of which you are a member. Also, will you please add **Brian** to your mailing list so that he can receive STOP as well? He said that he would enjoy it and he could really benefit from the knowledge. His address is: **Brian Kearns, #349-195, PO Box 7010, Chillicothe, OH 45601.** Thank you so very much for your time and may God be with you all” ...**Don Smith, Chillicothe, OH.** “Please take us off the mailing list as we no longer meet as a congregation. Thank you” ...**Warrenton Church of Christ, Vicksburg, MS.** “I would like to request that my name be added to your mail-

ing list. May God bless you and your readers of your wonderful publication. If you know of any good ‘by mail’ Church of Christ Bible studies, please let me know! Thanks for your help. May God bless you in your continued work” ...**Matthew Fore, Sandy Hook, KY.** “I would like you to put Mr & Mrs ... on your mailing list. Thank you in Christ” ...**Joe Turbeville, Dresden, TN.** “If man will not pray to God who created this universe, then as the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, the disciples of Satan need to be taught as well. ‘Our father (cf. John 8:44) who art in hell, unholy and degenerate is your name. Your kingdom has come and is full of darkness and corruption. Your will is done on earth but not in heaven. Give us our bread (if we get any bread) and let us be gluttonous and unsatisfied. Do not forgive us our debts for we do not forgive our debtors. We will seek revenge and evil toward those who do us wrong. Lead us into the temptations of the world that lead to hell: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Deliver us from the righteous, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory of sin and darkness until God calls for judgment day. Amen.’ Romans 1:28-32 is very clear: ‘And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” ...**Del Brantley, Salem, KY.**

ing list. May God bless you and your readers of your wonderful publication. If you know of any good ‘by mail’ Church of Christ Bible studies, please let me know! Thanks for your help. May God bless you in your continued work” ...**Matthew Fore, Sandy Hook, KY.** “I would like you to put Mr & Mrs ... on your mailing list. Thank you in Christ” ...**Joe Turbeville, Dresden, TN.** “If man will not pray to God who created this universe, then as the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, the disciples of Satan need to be taught as well. ‘Our father (cf. John 8:44) who art in hell, unholy and degenerate is your name. Your kingdom has come and is full of darkness and corruption. Your will is done on earth but not in heaven. Give us our bread (if we get any bread) and let us be gluttonous and unsatisfied. Do not forgive us our debts for we do not forgive our debtors. We will seek revenge and evil toward those who do us wrong. Lead us into the temptations of the world that lead to hell: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Deliver us from the righteous, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory of sin and darkness until God calls for judgment day. Amen.’ Romans 1:28-32 is very clear: ‘And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” ...**Del Brantley, Salem, KY.**

**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.

Editor: **Garland M. Robinson**  
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