

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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PUBLIC CONFESSION OF SINS VERSUS THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Victor M. Eskew

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). The inspired writer, James, teaches us the necessity of confessing our sins "one to another." This verse is the authority behind what is often called "a public confession." When the invitation is extended at the close of a sermon, often a member of the church will come forward and confess his/her sins. Once the confession is made, the church as a whole prays for God's forgiveness on the sinner's behalf.

There are some who have likened this practice to "The Sacrament of Penance" as practiced by the Catholic Church. However, there are some major differences that exist between the two practices. In the remainder of this article, we will examine these distinctions.

First, the Catholic Church lists "Penance" among the sacraments. A sacrament is a religious symbol or rite "which conveys divine grace, blessing, or sanctity upon the believer who participates in it" (wikipedia.com, "Sacrament").

The Bible, however, nowhere refers to sacraments. The confession of sins is considered part of the divine process whereby sins are forgiven by God (I John 1:9).

Second, the "Sacrament of

Penance" demands that confession be made before an official, duly ordained priest of the Catholic Church. One who is considered a layman in the Catholic Church cannot hear the confession of the penitent believer.

In the Lord's church, anyone is free to hear the confession of the penitent. In most cases, the first to hear is the preacher. He, then, tells the entire church about the sins being confessed. This writer has seen elders and other members of the church listen to the confession first. The Bible does not teach that confession must be taken by a duly ordained priest of the Catholic Church. James 5:16 teaches that confession is to be made "one to another."

Third, "Penance" or "Reconciliation" as practiced by the Catholics is done in private. The confession involves the sinner and the priest only.

This is not the case when a public confession is made by a member of the church. The sin may be revealed to the preacher first, but it is ultimately made known to the entire congregation. Since the sin involved the entire church, the entire congregation offers a prayer on the individual's behalf. When one offers the prayer, all the church is being led in the prayer.

Fourth, "Penance" as taught by the Romans Catholics involves all

the sins one has committed since one's last confession. These sins are both public and private transgressions. They can involve behavioral sins and sins one commits within the heart.

This is not the case when a member of the church comes forward confessing his sins. He comes only when his sins are of a public nature. These sins have adversely impacted the members of the body of which he is a part. Private sins and sins between brethren can be dealt with in a private setting (Matt. 18:15; Luke 17:3-4).

Fifth, the Catholic doctrine of *Auricular Confession* gives the priest the ability to absolve or remit the sins of the penitent. The priest will often make this statement during the confession: "God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The sacrament of forgiveness," 1449, p.404). Note the words: "I absolve you from your sins." The

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Public Confession...



Editorial...

THE RIGHT HAND AND THE LEFT HAND

Garland M. Robinson

***The people were warned time and time again,
don't deviate from God's law. Don't depart from it to
the left hand or to the right hand.***

Think of the church (which began in Jerusalem on Pentecost in Acts 2) as a straight "line" drawn on a board, starting at the bottom (33 A.D.) and moving upward (today and beyond). This line represents the faithful true church of Christ. It is always moving upward in a straight line. As the years and centuries come and go, there are some (and/or many) who depart from the line, some to the "left" and some to the "right."

The New Testament speaks plainly of a great apostasy from the faith. *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth"* (I Tim. 4:1-3). Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica concerning the Lord's second coming and said, *"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things"* (II Thess. 2:3-5). In verse 7, Paul tells them the apostasy had already begun. Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus and said, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over*

the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31). This text says that even some elders will be leading the way into apostasy. Sad, sad indeed! Not much has changed since then.

God has always warned his people to not stray from the "strait and narrow." We are always to walk in His Path and follow His Way. This was made clear to Moses and the children of Israel. In Deuteronomy chapter five we read, *"And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. ... Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the RIGHT HAND or to the LEFT"* (vs.1,32). This same admonition is seen throughout the Scriptures. The people were warned time and time again, don't deviate from God's law. Don't depart from it to the left hand or to the right hand.

THE LEFT HAND

The "left hand" is often referred to as "liberal." Liberalism is defined as "the quality or state of being liberal. Advocating the freedom of the

individual to assure unrestricted development in all spheres of human endeavors and guarantees of individual rights."

The left hand is also being referred to as "progressive." We're hearing more and more of some individuals and/or congregations being progressive. You would think that being progressive would be a good thing. What could possibly be wrong with favoring or advocating progress and/or using new ideas and methods? But this is not how the term is being used. When liberals use the word progressive, they have in mind "change" or "reform" as opposed to maintaining things as they are (as God has legislated). They desire to employ or advocate more enlightened or liberal ideas. They do not intend to be bound or limited by the Scriptures. They want to progress beyond the limits of the Scriptures. However, maintaining things as they are, as they have always been (tradition), is a good thing if it came from the apostles (cf. II Thess. 3:6). The traditions of men are condemned in the Scriptures (cf. Mark 7:1-13). But the traditions established by the apostles and inspired penmen of the New Testament are authorized. They are what we are to maintain (II Tim. 1:13). They are the words from which we will be judged (John 12:48).

The "left hand" (liberals, progressives) takes liberties with God's law. This position does not respect God's law and refuse to be bound by it. It says, "I know some say God forbids this or that, but I believe it will be alright to do it anyway. God is a loving God and he won't condemn me for violating his will." Such an idea does not respect God's laws and therefore does not recognize his authority. **The left hand allows what God forbids.** Individuals who wander off the "strait and narrow" path to the left hand, don't believe God means what he says. They do not believe the Bible is a rule book, a guide, a model, a pattern that is to be respected and followed. They look at, with disdain (disgust, outrage), anyone who believes in doing exactly what God says, nothing more and nothing less. However, those who espouse this position think they are right and do not recognize they could even possibly be wrong. They don't see they are going beyond the boundaries God has

given.

Liberals use all manner of terms and expressions in an effort to cast down those who love the Lord enough to honor and obey his will — terms such as legalists, pharisees(ism), right wingers, narrow minded (while they are broad minded), bible thumpers. Their attempt is to “poison the well” in the minds of those whom they seek to influence so they will not be receptive to the truth or those who uphold the truth.

The “left hand” believes in going beyond God’s word — allowing more than God allows. Those on the “left” act without authority from God. Authority is not important to them. They think the principle of authority is silly and foolish and they laugh at those who follow it. To them, it is sinful to see the Bible as the pattern, the blueprint. However, Colossians 3:17 demands authority for all we say and do. *“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.”*

Those who have gone off course on the “left hand” stand condemned in 2 John 9-11. *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into [your] house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”* The same point is made in First Corinthians 4:6. We are not to think above or beyond that which is written. Those on the “left hand” and the liberties they take with God’s Word, cause division. Romans 16:17-18 tells us what to do with those who cause division. *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”*

THE RIGHT HAND

The “right hand” is the opposite of the “left hand.” Whereas the “left

hand” ignores the laws of God and acts in open violation to them, the “right hand” stops short of God’s laws. This approach to the Bible will not allow the liberties God permits. **The right hand forbids what God allows.** It is to make laws God did not make and bind them upon themselves and others. The “right hand” looks at scriptures which authorize an action and will not allow it. They forbid (prohibit, refuse, outlaw) anyone to observe what God allows (authorizes, grants). It “binds” where God has not “bound.”

There is no one word that would particularly identify this position. In the sense that one may oppose what God allows, such could be called “anti” — against. Some of the Pharisees made laws based upon their traditions and bound them upon others (Mark 7:1-13). The Lord condemned them for their hypocrisy and elevating tradition above law. (As there is a sense in which the word “liberal” is good, such as being liberal givers, II Cor. 9:6-7; there is a sense in which the word “anti” is good. That is, we are to be against everything God forbids. But these definitions are not what is under consideration in this article.)

Sometimes the word “conservative” is used to apply to those who make laws God did not make. However, the definition of the word “conservative” does not show this to be the case. The word “conservative” according to Random House Dictionary is: “disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc. Traditional in style or manner. A person who is conservative in principles, actions, habits, etc.” Webster says the same. Dictionary.com says, “disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc. or to restore traditional ones, and to limit change.” This being the case, it appears that one who believes in following the New Testament and using it as a pattern is a conservative. That is, such a person is doing exactly what the New Testament authorizes — not deviating to the right hand or to the left. This is one who does not make laws that God did not make, nor does he loose (ignore, disregard) the laws that God did make.

The truth of the matter is that God’s Word is *“...true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous*

judgments endureth for ever” (Psa. 119:160). God’s word is “strait and narrow” (Matt. 7:14). That means it is “close, hemmed in, to crowd.” It is the way that leads to eternal life and few are those who follow it. The Truth is the strait and narrow path between the extremes of the right hand and the left hand. If you are driving down the road and run off into the ditch, it doesn’t make any difference if it’s the ditch on the left or the right, you’re still in the ditch! One is just as bad as the other.

All the ways to the left and all the ways to the right, constitute the broad and wide way (Matt. 7:13). Imagine a clock on the wall. 12 o’clock is the way that leads to God and heaven. Anything and everything to the left of 12 ignores some or many of the laws God made. Consequently, it is the wrong way. Anything and everything to the right of 12 makes laws God did not make. Consequently, it is the wrong way. 12 o’clock is single, narrow, strait. It includes all the ways and laws of God. It is the New Testament (when “rightly divided,” 2 Tim. 2:15). It does not include man-made ways — whether they “loose” laws God made or “bind” laws God did not make. Everything from 12:01 to 11:59 is the wrong way. This way is wide and broad and easily contrasted with the strait and narrow (cf. Matt. 7:13-14).

It is easy to choose to go the way that is broad and wide. That is the way the world is rushing along. The Lord’s way is exclusive and narrow. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). That does not allow any other religion. That does not allow any other “so-called” savior. That does not allow any other way. We must choose the way of truth (Psa. 119:30) or be lost!

Which way are you traveling? Are you on the left or on the right? Or, are you on the strait and narrow? Don’t apologize for loving the truth and holding to the “old paths” which is the good way, the right way (cf. Jer. 6:16). It’s the ONLY way that leads to life everlasting. *“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith”* (II Cor. 13:5).

**PLEASE SEND US YOUR
CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

LAW AND GRACE

Franklin Camp, deceased

A major problem in religion today is a misconception of law and grace. This has been a stumbling block from the time sin entered the world.

A failure to grasp the subject is fatal to the soul. Grace is the foundation of redemption. The one who errs here will miss heaven (Eph. 2:8-10).

A cardinal fallacy is the doctrine that law excludes grace. This position creates paramount issues. If grace excludes law, it excludes obedience. Law is essential to obedience. One must have something to obey. One cannot obey nothing.

The religious world generally denies the necessity of obedience in becoming a Christian. Some equate obedience with works that do not save. But James 2:14-26, along with other passages, cannot be harmonized with the doctrine of "faith alone."

Others know obedience is essential, yet struggle in trying to exclude law, but not obedience. If grace excludes all law, no door is open for obedience.

If law excludes grace, one of two things must follow: either there is no room for obedience, or if obedience is essential, one must explain what must be obeyed. One may say "commandments" must be obeyed, but this will not resolve the issue. A difference in "command" and "law" cannot be explained by those who reject law but want to retain commands. "*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. ... Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments*" (Psalm 119:1,6). Law and commandments are synonymous terms throughout the Bible.

Does grace exclude obedience to the commands of the Gospel? The Gospel has commands (I Cor. 14:37). God would not provide salvation by grace and give commands that conflict with grace.

Some say grace and commands harmonize. If grace and commands harmonize, grace and law also harmonize. The exclusion of law excludes commands. There is no way one can exclude law and include commands.

Denominational preachers try to

avoid the problem by teaching obedience is not essential in becoming a Christian, but is necessary for the Christian. When pressed, they will deny that one's obedience has anything to do with salvation, but they refuse to teach their members obedience is not important. Thus, they find themselves in a strange situation — obedience is important, but not required.

Some say, "But a Christian will want to obey." Why obey something that has no relationship to going to heaven?

Let me raise some questions for those teaching that grace excludes law. Is grace no longer essential *after* becoming a Christian? When one is saved by grace, does he then live the Christian life by law without grace? Surely not. Does it not follow that one obeys after becoming a Christian and that obedience does not conflict with grace? When the Christian obeys, what is obeyed? If commands, it is law.

One not only becomes a Christian by faith, but the Christian lives by faith (Gal. 2:11,20). One cannot live the Christian life by faith alone — that is, faith minus obedience. Then why think one may become a Christian by faith minus obedience?

No one denies a Christian must be obedient (Heb. 5:8,9). What does the Christian obey? Is it law? If not, what does he obey? If law, then law does not exclude grace. Christians are not sinlessly perfect. That kind of imperfection requires grace.

There is the second law of pardon for the Christian. I do not hesitate to refer to it as the law of pardon for a Christian. When a Christian sins, he must repent (Acts 8:22). He must confess his sin and pray (I John 1:7-9; Acts 8:22).

Would one deny that a Christian must obey these commands? When one obeys them, is it submission to law? Does one's obedience cancel out grace?

When one is forgiven, it must be in one of two ways: merit or grace. Forgiveness by merit is an impossibility. Pardon is extended only through grace. When a Christian sins, repents, confesses it, and prays, he has submitted to law and receives pardon. Obedience is necessary, but it does not earn pardon.

If the second law of pardon does

not conflict with grace, why would the first law of pardon, the one for the alien?

Grace does not exclude law if correctly interpreted.

Public Confession...

(Continued from page 9)

word "I" refers to the priest. The Catholics believe that a priest has the power to forgive sins.

In the Lord's church, when prayer is offered for the penitent, God is addressed. The one praying asks the Father in heaven to forgive the one who has come confessing his/her sins.

Sixth, the Catholic Confession also involves what is referred to as "satisfaction." In the *Catechism*, we read the following: "Absolution takes away sin, it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for sin: he must 'make satisfaction for' or 'expiate' his sins. This satisfaction is also called 'penance' (p.407). Mere confession, therefore, is not enough according to Catholics. There must be a payment. "It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all patient acceptance of the cross we bear" (*Catechism*, p.407).

The public confession in the Lord's church **never** involves satisfaction or penance. The penitent is never told that he must do something more after repentance and confession in order to be right with God.

The six things we have discussed show that a great gulf exists between our public confession and the Auricular Confession of the Catholic Church. To make the claim that they are similar is a false claim. The confession of sins as practiced in the church of Christ harmonizes with James 5:16. The Sacrament of Penance contains much that is man-made. May each of us be pleased to "confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another." We do this because of God's promise that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

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GOD'S WILL AND MAN'S SALVATION

John D. Cotham

1 Timothy 2:3-4, *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”*

Some teach that God’s will is IRRESISTIBLE and that all will be saved. There is the argument that whatever God wills cannot be resisted by man and will invariably come to pass. This writer would in no wise suggest that all of God’s will can be resisted by man. Many things that God has willed cannot be stopped. The establishment of the kingdom of Christ could not be stopped by the Jews as some suggest. The end of time and the judgment day will not be stopped by man. On the other hand, there are some parts of God’s will that men resist every day. If this were not so, then irreversible damage is done to the entirety of God’s word and especially to the statements of Paul in the verses above.

In 1 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul says that God “will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” If all of God’s will invariably comes to pass, this statement of Paul presents two problems.

First, Paul says it is God’s will for everyone to be saved. If it is the case that God’s will is irresistible, then all men will be saved regardless of who they are or whatever they do. If it is the case that God’s will cannot be resisted, then there will be universal salvation.

Second, if all are automatically saved by God’s will, what would be the purpose of “coming to the knowledge of the truth?” If God wills man to be saved, and man has nothing to do with his own salvation; then knowledge of truth is of no consequence.

Any good student of the Bible knows that anything willed by God which depends only upon His action will invariably come to pass such as: *“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light”* (Gen. 1:3); or *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”* (Gen. 1:26). These all depended upon God’s action alone, and they came to pass

just as they were willed.

However, God has determined (willed) that many things are dependent upon man’s will and action. Anything dependent upon man’s will does not invariably come to pass. God willed that man offer a specific sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4). Abel followed God’s will, Cain did not. Noah and his family carried out God’s will and were saved; the rest rejected God’s will and were lost (Genesis chapters 6 and 7). In another case, God willed the destruction of Nineveh, but the citizens of Nineveh repented. The destruction did not come to pass because, in this case, man’s will to repent prompted God to change His will.

It is truly God’s will that ALL men be saved: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). The Hebrew writer said, *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb. 2:9). It is God’s will that ALL men come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4). Man can know the truth for Jesus said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). Yet the fact is, God has left it to the will of man to seek that knowledge and the salvation that is offered through Jesus. Man must still obey God’s will in order to have salvation. *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”* (Heb. 5:9).

Not only must man obey God’s conditions for the forgiveness of sins, but man must continue to obey. Notice 1 John 1:7-9, *“if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to*

cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Those who are saved are told, *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10).

It is God’s will that you be saved. He has done all He is going to do in order for you to have salvation (see John 3:16 above). You must make the decision to “come to the knowledge of the truth” concerning what you must do. You must believe, repent, confess your belief in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. Won’t you make that decision today? If you are a child of God, won’t you make a greater commitment to follow His will each day?

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CONTRIBUTIONS

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Elder's COLUMN

PLACING MEMBERSHIP

James Dennison

The word “church” in our English Bibles is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*. This word is also translated as “assembly” in Acts 19:32,39,41, Acts 7:38, R.V.; and as “congregation” in Hebrews 2:12, R.V., as well as an alternate reading in Matthew 18:17, R.V.

In relation to Christians, the word “church” is given two different applications in the New Testament. 1) The totality of all the saved (redeemed, saints, etc.) of the whole world. Such usage is found in Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:18. We generally speak of this usage as the “universal church”. 2) A group of Christians who have united together to work and worship as a single unit. Such usage is found in Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:1. We usually speak of this as the “local church.”

In Acts 14:23 and Philippians 1:1, we find that the “local church” is given a plurality of elders whose task is: 1) to “oversee” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2); literally, “to look over — or after — a flock”. 2) To “feed (or tend) the flock” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). 3) Teaching (1 Tim. 3:2). 4) Protect (Titus 1:9). 5) “Rule” (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17); literally, “To stand before” or “To be at the head as leader”. 6) To be an example or pattern (1 Peter 5:3). 7) To watch after and give an account to God for souls in their charge (Heb. 13:17).

If elders adequately perform their God-given tasks, and discharge their responsibilities to the flock, they must know who are members of the “local flock — church”, which they oversee. This necessitates what is generally called “being identified” or “placing membership.” By this process the elders know that you are not “just a visitor” but that you intend to “work and worship” as a

member of that congregation and to be under their oversight.

The scriptures indicate that Christians should be not only a part of the “universal church,” but also a part of a “local church.” When Paul arrived at Jerusalem, he endeavored to “join himself” to the disciples there (Acts 9:26). Paul and Barnabas later became “identified” with the church at Antioch (Acts 11:26; 13:1).

Though it is conceivable that conditions may exist, where for a time one is a member only of the “universal church” (Acts 8:35-39), he should, as soon as possible, become “identified” with a “local church,” as did Paul and Barnabas (Phil. 4:9). If there is not a faithful congregation of the Lord’s people meeting in that area, he should begin one. Thus, the idea that one can be a member of a “local church” where he has not worshipped for weeks, months, and sometimes years, is denominational in origin and unscriptural in concept.

Some, to avoid responsibilities and discipline, will become “floating members” — just visiting around from place to place, never “identifying” with any one congregation. If these people become needful of discipline and are approached by the elders of any of the congregations where they attend, their immediate reply is; “but, we’re not members of your congregation!” Therefore, to eliminate this, when we move to another town or permanently sever our connection with a congregation, we should find another faithful congregation of the Lord’s people and “join” ourselves to them — settle down and go to work.

Also, we should not lightly sever our connection with one congregation and “place membership” with another. Naturally, if we move from one town to another, it becomes essential that we do so at once. Sometime we may deem it necessary to become

part of another “local church” within the same general area where we have previously worked and worshipped because: 1) We feel it necessary for our own spiritual growth. 2) We feel that such will enable us to be more effective and useful for the Lord. 3) There are unscriptural doctrines and/or practices in the former congregation which we are unable to correct. However, let us be sure that we can substantiate our claim of such. 4) There is such a strong difference of opinion as to the advisability — not scripturalness — of a particular work or activity that we feel it is better for peace and harmony that we work and worship elsewhere (Acts 15:36-41). If this is the reason, when at all possible, we should “forbear” with one another (Eph. 4:2). 5) We have been unscripturally and unjustifiable “withdrawn” from and are unable to get the mistake corrected. This sometimes happens. But let’s be positive it is they who are wrong and not us! Also, that we have done ALL in our power to rectify the error!

When we leave one congregation and become “joined” to another, we should be ENTIRELY POSITIVE that our motives are honest and justifiable. It should never be done: 1) To put pressure on the former congregation to honor our particular whim. 2) Because the truth has been preached and our toes thereby stepped on. 3) To escape discipline or responsibilities. 4) Through jealousy and envy because we have been passed over for some particular work. If it be for such reasons as these, we will soon be dissatisfied with the new congregation!

When one “identifies” himself with a congregation, he should be admitted into the fellowship of that “local church.” If there seems any reason to doubt or question his previous faithfulness, the elders should exert every effort possible to satisfy themselves that this person is faithful and not in need of restoration. If it is found that he has not been faithful, or transferred membership to escape needed discipline, then the church should institute disciplinary action against this new member just as they would against any other. Likewise, if we seek to sever our connection with one congregation that we may be “joined” to a religious body in error, the elders have no course open but to begin disciplinary procedure.

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, THE WORD OF GOD!

Marvin L. Weir

The apostle Paul vividly describes the Christian's armor: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:13-17). It is God's inspired, infallible, inerrant Word that we want to consider in this study.

The Word of God is not only important, it is essential to one who desires to go to Heaven. Without a complete and sufficient guide, man is doomed to find his way to Heaven. God's faithful prophet Jeremiah said, "O LORD, I know that the way of man [is] not in himself: [it is] not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). The Holy Scriptures are such a guide or road map. The apostle Paul says, "All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Jesus Christ is our example (I Peter 2:21). He effectively used the "sword of the Spirit" when tempted by the devil. Satan wanted Christ to demonstrate His power by turning stones into bread, but the Lord rightly answered, "...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Keep in mind that the Lord's answer is a long established principle! Long ago Moses stated, "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every [word] that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). Mark it down well, the

sword of the Spirit will not fail one today!

While it is true that man must have bread in order to survive, it is equally true that "bread alone" indicates that one is dead while he lives! Jesus was extremely popular with the masses after feeding the five thousand (Matt. 14), but when He refused to be a mere "bread Messiah," the number of followers dwindled considerably. Those today who refuse to supply man with his "felt needs" while feeding him spiritual bread will also grow smaller in number. The faithful, however, will stand where Jesus stood and say, "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33).

It is not that the Lord is not conscious of our physical needs. He is! But He also knows that man's greatest problem is not physical starvation or poverty, man's greatest problem is sin. In fact, the more material things some folks have, the greater the probability they will forsake following the Word of God. The Lord's statement in Matthew 16:26 must not be forgotten: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is something far more important and precious than the "bread of the world" which is here today and gone tomorrow.

Let us reflect again on the statement Jesus made in Matt. 4:4: "...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (emph. MLW). Many people in this world believe some of what Jesus teaches in the Holy Scriptures. Most people readily admit, however, that they do not necessarily believe all the Bible teaches. Please make special note of "every word" as recorded in Matthew 4:4. Jesus did not teach that man will live by some words, most words, or a few words, but by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The Bible is not a "pick and choose book" whereby one can accept one verse of Scripture and reject another verse of Scripture. Listen to

the Lord as He says, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my word, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Again, Christ declares, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say" (Luke 6:46)? Christ is not the ruler of the one who adamantly refuses to do what the Lord says one must do to be His follower.

It will not be a tomahawk, a colt 45, a cruise missile, or a nuclear warhead that gets us to Heaven. If Heaven is to be the home of our soul, it will be because we were familiar with and effectively used the "sword of the Spirit" every day of our journey through this foreign land.

May we hunger after "spiritual bread" and remember that the only citizenship that matters is located in Heaven (Phil. 3:21).

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WHAT MEN PREFER

- **Men prefer their own authority rather than the Lord's.** Jesus has ALL authority (Matt. 28:18). It is by HIS WORD that we will be judged (John 12:48).
- **Men prefer denominations rather than the Lord's church.** Jesus built only ONE church (Matt. 16:18). He is the saviour of the body, the church (Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23).
- **Men prefer human names rather than the Lord's name.** There is no other name than Jesus by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). There is no shame in being a Christian (I Peter 4:16). "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16).
- **Men prefer their own way of salvation rather than the Lord's way.** "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). "Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38).
- **Men prefer their own way of worship rather than the Lord's.** Man's way of worship is vain (Matt. 15:8-9). The Lord's worship is in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).



SEEK THE OLD PATHS

Would like to stay anonymous. Thanks" **...Name Withheld.** "Thank you for sending me STOP. I enjoy the articles. I would like to receive the series on 'Can a Child of God be Lost?'" **...Keith Lause, London, OH.** "I have received STOP for several years and want to encourage you in your good work. Please add some names to the list" **...Gevan Murphy, Imboden, AR.** "Thank you for your good work" **...Debora Drake, Englewood, FL.** "We get the publication of *Seek The Old Paths* and we do read and enjoy this. Sending a check to help with this good work" **...Name withheld by request.** "Please send us another copy of the Dec/09 issue on 'The Early Years of Canonization.' I passed my copy on to our minister. I would like one to file and reread" **...Jean Mayfield, Signal Mountain, TN.** "Please change our address. We would still like to receive the publication. My youngest son Jacob is planning on attending West Virginia School of Preaching in the fall, Lord willing. Thanks" **...Sherry Morris, Bucyrus, OH.** "We are now ministering to a congregation in Laredo. Please send our copy to our new address. We arrived Dec. 30th and by the grace of God, have had four baptisms this month. This congregation is sound. At the end of last August, I was fired by a congregation west of San Antonio because 'we want to hear a gospel with no negatives.' But God is good! There we had 25-35 seat warming do-nothings. Here we have 85 plus who have fallen in love with Jesus Christ. There, we lived in a 100 year old dump with many defects. Here we have a beautiful and spacious new home. There we had a tiny community very prejudiced against the church because of a hypocrite in a leadership position. Here we have 250,000 unsaved people and no internal opposition. How good can it get?" **...Al Sowins, Loredo, TX.** "I would like to thank you for sending STOP to our home. We truly enjoy every article. I have told many others of this excellent publication and if you would, may you put these names on your mailing list. Many thanks. I have enclosed a small donation to help in the mailings. Not much I know, but with the economy as it is at the present time, this is the best we can do. Many thanks for your great work. May God continue to bless your efforts" **...E. Russell Billings, Brighton, IL.** "We love the paper" **...Bob & Neoma Haskin, Denison, TX.** "I'm glad your work is doing ok. We sure do need lots more of God's truth. I'm sending a little more of the Lord's help. How does a person handle this problem? Someone dies and you know their life. They claimed to be a Christian but you know they were not. Their life was the way of the world. Everyone speaks of them going to heaven. Their life was really quite different from being a Christian. How should we deal with this?" **...name withheld by request, OH.** [EDITOR'S NOTE: It's comforting to those who are not Christians to think of those who have died as going to heaven. Generally always such an individual is 'preached into heaven.' But, those who know the Bible know otherwise. Salvation is only reserved for those who OBEY the Lord (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 7:21). We simply have to stand firm in what the Bible says. We cannot presume to pass judgment of our own when that privilege is reserved to God (cf. Rom. 12:19). It's too late to help the deceased. Their destiny is sealed. Nothing we can say will change that one way or the other. We can (and should) try to help those who remain to learn and know the truth while they have opportunity. Emotions run high during the loss of a loved one. As we have opportunity, we should keep on showing the truth. But at the same time, be sympathetic and compassionate to family members of the deceased. At this critical time, doors may be opened with those who remain. We should weigh our words and try to be careful to not slam the door of opportunity. Stay the course and never give up the faith. -gmr] "Please remove my name from your mailing list. I have enjoyed your publication over the past years. I hope this will help you save money on postage. Please withhold my name. Your brother in Christ" **...Cookeville, TN.** "I seen a copy of your monthly publication, *Seek The Old Paths*. I enjoyed it very much and wonder if you would send me a copy of your publication? Thank you" **...Marjorie King, Clinton Township, MI.** "I'm writing to ask if it would be possible for me to get the back issue of STOP for Nov/09? I discovered I didn't have

"I would like very much to receive your monthly publication. Have enjoyed reading the one that was given to me. Keep up the good work. Thanks" **...Johnny Stevens, Sherwood, TN.** "Please put me on your mailing list. Thanks" **...Velma Wright, Flintville, TN.** "We get the publication and we do read and enjoy it.

it when I put my December issue away. I'm sending a small contribution to be put toward the magazine or any where it's needed. Thank you so much for the good sound articles. They're getting more scarce of late" **...Geneva Stark, Eufaula, OK.** [EDITOR'S NOTE: We always keep a supply of back issues on hand. The Truth is always relevant and never grows old. What was spoken or written many years ago is just as appropriate today as it was when first taught. We're glad to be able to help through the avenue of the printed word. Back issues are also available on the internet at seektheoldpaths.com. The entire web site is searchable if you can't remember which issue you're looking for. You can print out anything you like.

"Evidence from Genetics: Mutations (chance errors in genes) are the only proposed mechanism whereby new genetic information for evolution can emerge. It is common knowledge that rarely, if ever, does a mutation improve an organism in its natural environment. Almost all observable mutations are harmful; some are meaningless; many are lethal. No known mutation has ever produced a form of life having greater complexity and viability than its ancestors. There is no reason to believe that mutations or any natural process could ever produce any new organs — especially those as complex as our eye, ear, or brain. For example, an adult human brain contains over a hundred thousand billion electrical connections, more than all the electrical connections in all the electrical appliances in the entire world. Just the human heart, a ten-ounce pump that will operate without maintenance or lubrication for over 75 years, is an engineering marvel. To this day the heart is unparalleled by any man-made pump. How could random mistakes to the genetic code produce improvements? How could random changes have produced these marvels in the first place?" **-A Closer Look at the Evidence by Richard & Tina Kleiss.**

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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