



Seek The Old Paths

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

Vol. 28, No. 3

March 2017

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Denver Thomas

The sign over the door or in front of the building that says “Church of Christ,” does not always mean what it once did. It’s what goes on inside that reveals the real truth.

The religious community of today is prone to explain the Lord’s church as being a sect which arose some two hundred years ago in the rural Mid-Atlantic States. But we can read of its existence much sooner — 2,000 years ago. The builder Himself (Jesus Christ) said, *“And I say also unto thee...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matt. 16:18-19). On the day of Pentecost we see Peter using those keys when he said, *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36). What other so-called church of today can make this claim? None!

The religious community has a multiplicity of “terms of entrance” into their respective organization. Some may say “All you need to do is believe,” while others may suggest “Just pray the sinners prayer,” and the list goes on and on. But what did Jesus say? *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). We know that “belief alone” is not enough. What did James say? *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead”* (James 5:20)? *“Ye see then how*

that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). Neither was Paul saved by prayer. More was required of him (Read Acts 9:11ff; Acts 22:16)!

The religious community may suggest people of all so-called faiths will reach Heaven. But what did Paul have to say about that? *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”* (Eph. 4:4-6). Since the Scripture clearly states there is “one faith,” how can it be thought there can exist all the other so-called faiths? Assuredly, they are of man and not of God.

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). He will save His body which is His church! And no other! *“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

While all this is of grave concern, what about that which we see occurring within the Lord’s church itself? We should note that the sign over the door or in front of the building that says “Church of Christ,” does not always mean what it once did. It’s what goes on inside that reveals the real truth. Some have gone so far as to alter their sign to indicate some exception or some distinction that sets that group apart. Others may have simply removed their sign altogether.

It is generally understood that churches of Christ are autonomous; that is, each congregation acts separately and apart from all others with each congregation having its own oversight (elders). However, each congregation is a part of the universal “one body,” the church (Col. 1:18). So, when we speak of the Lord’s church in this context, we are speaking of its totality.

The literature it uses continues to show how the church as a whole is being degraded by those who are unwilling to take the Bible for what it has to say. Twisting and wresting of the Scriptures, using versions of the Bible whose content has been altered by sectarian councils and just wanting to be accepted by the masses has resulted in some “worship activities” that violate the Holy Scriptures. The sectarian world has for some years al-

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Editorial...

FINDING GRACE TO HELP #1

Garland M. Robinson

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Why is that men often wait until the very last moment to call out to God? Only after they have done all they can do, when they are desperate for help, they seek the Lord. The story is told of a man on his roof who lost his footing. As he began to slide down, groping at everything he could possibly reach to catch himself from falling, he cried out to God, help me, save me! Just as he was about to tumble over the edge, a nail snagged his pants and stopped him. He was then heard to say, never mind God, this nail saved me. Is God only there as a life preserver? Is that the only time we need him? Just at the last moment when all else fails? No. A million times no.

Unless we seek God in both good times and bad times, all the time, He is not going to be there for us when times get hard. He does not simply want to be a *part* of our lives. He wants to be the *focus* — the very *center* of our lives.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” When we obey the Gospel, we walk a new life, a life where we are no longer a servant of sin (cf. Rom. 6:4,6). We now live unto God. Sin no longer reigns in our life. Romans 6:13-14 makes this point very clear: “Neither yield ye your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness unto God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

Colossians 3:4 says Christ “is our life.” That means we live according to His will 24/7. He is not there simply for emergencies. However, when we need Him ever so close in times of de-

spair and in our darkest hour, we are able to boldly approach His throne and obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Ephesians 3:12 also speaks of this: “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” We all need help. We all are so vulnerable. What a blessing it is for God to be there for us. We can and must depend upon Him for everything.

In His creation, God made many newborns to be able to fend for themselves very soon after birth, but human infants are not in that number. At birth, a baby is among the most helpless in all of God’s creation. But when man grows to adulthood, God has given him prowess (intelligence, skill, dominion) over all living things (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). On the other hand, man is weak, helpless, feeble, in spite of his often displays of pride, arrogance and independence. In moments of tragedy this is displayed so vividly when man is brought low and made to see his vulnerability and defenselessness.

Man is filled with sin and stands separated before God because of it. In Romans we read, “All have sinned and come short of the grace of God. ... There is none righteous, no not one” (3:23,10). Man needs help. He needs spiritual help. To that end, Jesus came into the world to save sinful man, to seek and to save the lost (cf. Luke 19:10). While we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us (Rom. 5:8). The blood he shed on the cross was for our redemption. Ephesians 1:7 is a beautiful verse, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

Without the grace of God there would be no hope for any of us. “For by grace are ye saved through faith;

and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Just four verses later shows the condition of the brethren at Ephesus before they obeyed the Gospel in order to become Christians. “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: ¹³But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

God is a loving, merciful, forgiving God. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (1 Peter 3:9). And, when men **hear** the saving message of the Gospel (Rom. 10:14,17), **believe** that message concerning Jesus being the Christ, the Lord, the son of God (John 8:24; Mark 16:16), **repent** of their sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30), **confess** the sweet name of Jesus as the Christ the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37), and are **baptized** into water for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), they are saved — saved from the penalty and consequence of sin. Obedience to the Gospel, the Truth, is what purifies one’s soul (1 Peter 1:22).

Believing without obeying is useless — as useless as useless can be. Jesus made it plain when he spoke these words, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23).

Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The masses have no clue what that means. Their concept is that all a person has to do, even at the last moment before they die, is say they believe on Jesus as the savior and they will be saved. What Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 makes it ever so plain that it does not mean that at all! It means exactly the same thing Jesus said. Those who will be saved are those who **do the will of the Father** in heaven. That means obedience to his will! Jesus said it this way in Luke 6:46, “And why call ye

me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Faith is not a "saving faith" unless and until it is an "obeying faith" — obeying God's holy word (cf. James 2:14-26).

The love and care of our Lord does not stop when one obeys the Gospel. A whole new world opens up for the child of God. We now live in a community of brethren that literally extends around the world. Peter wrote "...to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). He said, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that [pertain] unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:2-3).

As Christians, we have the shoulders of brethren to lean on. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." What a tremendous help it is to have others upon whom we can depend — brethren who sincerely care for us and are willing to help us bare our load. Certain burdens can be made so much easier when we share them with others. What a blessing!

On the other hand, some burdens are ours and ours alone. They cannot be shared with others. Galatians 6:5 says, "For every man shall bear his own burden." We cannot always shift responsibility and put our troubles and fears off on someone else. There comes a time we must step up to the plate, so to speak, and deal with it in a proper and scriptural way. We will be stronger as a result of it. We are the benefactor when we weather the storms of life. One of the purposes of living in this world is to prove ourselves. We are commanded to take responsibility for our actions. Things are not always pleasant to deal with, but we're better for it when we handle it ourselves.

But then, there is another type of burden that we can neither bare it ourselves nor share it with brethren. Regarding such hardships we are told, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa. 55:22). One of the greatest blessings we have that others in the world do not have, is a loving car-

ing heavenly Father upon whom we can depend. As Psalm 55:22 says, "he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

In the world, there have been kings many and royalties in abundance, but none like our Lord. As Paul wrote to Timothy, Jesus is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Men will fail, but the God of the universe will never fail. He is there. He will sustain us. He will keep us. Paul wrote that he had to suffer many things, "...nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). First Peter 1:3-5 says, "Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a **lively hope** by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To **an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**"

One of the things that troubled Paul was what he called a "thorn in the flesh." In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 we read about it. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Many have spent countless hours trying to determine exactly what his thorn in the flesh was. But the fact remains, we don't know. It hasn't been revealed to us. What we should concentrate on is what Paul learned from it and how we can benefit from his example. God did not see fit to remove it from him. It is not in God's will to cater to his children's every whim. The difficulties and trials of life can serve to "make us" or "brake us." It's our attitude toward them that makes all the difference in the world.

Paul said he prayed about it and

ask the Lord three times to remove it from him. But the Lord's answer was, "my grace is sufficient for thee." Whatever this infirmity was, it caused no serious and lasting harm to Paul. No doubt it was a great discomfort and nuisance, one Paul had to suffer through each day. But, God's grace was sufficient. Paul found grace to help in time of need. God's grace was enough. It would carry him through.

How often we don't understand the twists and turns of life, the difficulties we face, the monsters that hound us, the stresses that bare upon us. But, the Lord will see us through if we will place our trust and confidence in Him. We too will find grace to help in time of need.

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Bradford C/C, Bradford, TN	\$50
Beginning Balance	\$9,239.52
Contributions	\$2,645.00
Debits	
Postage	\$1,865.07
Supplies	\$386.12
Website	\$99.00
Ending Balance	\$ 9,534.33

Elder's COLUMN

POSTMODERN THINKING #3 TRUTH IS RELATIVE

Victor M. Eskew

Postmodern thinking has invaded the United States of America and the world. In conversations with individuals, it is easy to see how many elements of this thinking have been accepted by the public. We are saddened when we talk to those who profess to be Christians who have embraced some of the tenets of this ungodly thinking. Dear readers, we must be warned. If postmodern thinking fills our minds, it will direct our behavior (cf. Prov. 4:23; 23:7).

Postmodernism seeks to convince us that *truth is relative*. Truth is defined as: “inflexible reality: invariable facts.” Absolute truth is true at all times, in all places, and for all people. It remains the same. Truth does not contradict. Absolute truth is established by law.

“Relativism” states that points of view have no absolute truth or validity, they are only relative — subjective values based upon an individual’s perception or consideration. In essence, this view (thinking) is that truth is based upon a person’s feelings, opinions, and perceptions. Thus they say, what is truth for one person may not be truth for another person. Relative truth changes. Relative truth involves contradictions. Here are some of the statements affirmed by those who accept the concept of relative truth:

1. Truth is relative.
2. There are no absolutes.
3. No one knows what truth is.
4. There is no hierarchy of truth or values.
5. There is no right or wrong.
6. Everyone can believe whatever he wants to believe.
7. It is wrong for you to impose your values on me.

When we hear statements like these we are reminded of the question Pilate asked our Lord Jesus Christ: “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38)?

Most of the time, those who believe in relative truth do so in order to release themselves from the constraints of religion. They do not want to believe in God. They do not want to believe the Bible is the Word of God.

They do not want to be bound by any form of moral law. They do not want to be judged by others. They want to do their own things. They do not want to deal with any negative emotions produced by their conscience.

Let’s examine three points concerning “relative truth”:

Relative truth contradicts itself. Relative truth affirms: “Truth is relative.” That means it is subject to circumstances and conditions. The question that must be asked is: “Is this statement absolute truth?” If the person says “Yes,” then he contradicts his own beliefs. Remember, in a relative world, no absolute truth exists. Relative truth also affirms that it is “wrong” for one person to impose his values on another person. The question is: “Why is it wrong?” If no right and wrong really exists (according to them), what makes something wrong? The one who holds to the idea that truth is relative is wrong for telling another person he is wrong. He is doing the very thing he condemns others for doing!

There is not even one person alive who lives in a world of complete relative truth. The law of gravity is absolute. Denying the law of gravity will not change it. If a person who believes in relative truth denies gravity, he will still plummet to the ground if he steps off the roof of a building. $2+2=4$ is absolute truth. A child in a class will be graded down if he answers $2+2=5$. One can claim that truth is relative all day long, but it will not change the truth that $2+2=4$.

The fact is, all of us need and want absolute truth in our lives. If I spend fifty cents, I want fifty cents back from my dollar. If a store clerk only returns a quarter to me, I will confront him and tell him he did not give me enough money back. What if he said: “I believe truth is relative. I believe that seventy-five cents is equal to a dollar?” We would be upset. Too, we would not allow him to get by with his false statement. A dollar is one hundred cents regardless of what the clerk believes. If someone enters my home and

steals my possessions, I want that person prosecuted for theft. I do not want someone trying to explain to me that right and wrong do not exist and that this man’s theft was acceptable in his eyes. The same would be true if a forty year old man tried to have a sexual relationship with a fourteen year old girl. Just to say that the pedophile’s truth says such a relationship is justified does not make it right. My friends, if truth is relative, our society would collapse due to moral bankruptcy.

Absolute truth exists because there is a God in heaven who is truth and who does not change (See Malachi 3:6; John 14:6; Psalm 19:9-11; Matt. 7:24-25). The God of heaven and earth created this world and filled it with physical laws that do not change. He also gave a spiritual law to mankind that is truth (John 17:17). It reveals what is right and wrong. Those who deny that absolute truth exists in the Word of God will never change the fact that it exists.

It is essential for God-loving people to confront the relativism that exists in the denominational world. Many people believe that the Bible is open to many interpretations. These interpretations can contradict one another and religious people seem to be okay with this result. They will claim that two conflicting statements are truth. This is relativism in another garment. Remember, absolute truth never contradicts itself. The reality is that there is only one true interpretation of the Word of God. This is made clear in a discussion Jesus had with a Jewish lawyer. The lawyer asked the question: “*Master, what shall I do to have eternal life?*” (Luke 10:25)? Jesus immediately pointed him to the standard — the absolute truth, the Word of God. “*He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?*” (Luke 10:26)? The lawyer responded with this answer: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself?*” (Luke 10:27). Now, listen to Jesus’ response: “*Thou*

has answered right..." (Luke 10:28). The lawyer's interpretation of the law was right. Had he been wrong, Jesus would have corrected him. Jesus would never acknowledge a wrong interpretation to be the truth. Jesus did not accept relativism. My friends, there are many wrong interpretations of the Word of God, but there is only

one correct interpretation of God's Word. We must not be ashamed to accept God's word as absolute truth.

Friends, **Truth is not relative. It is absolute!** We all understand this deep down inside. Was truth relative to Adam and Eve? Absolutely not! Their failure to abide by the truth brought death and destruction to

mankind. The same will happen to our society and to the church if we embrace the postmodern idea that truth is relative.

In the long ago, Solomon exhorted God's people correctly, saying: "*Buy the truth, and sell it not...*" (Prov. 23:23).

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What's Wrong?...

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lowed women to assume leadership roles. The Church of England (as of 01/2015) allows women preachers. So also, some churches of Christ are trying to be like the world rather than the peculiar people God intended (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

We observe the following as examples of the gross violation of Scripture among some churches of Christ today:

Rick Atchley (Richland Hills Church of Christ in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area). Richland Hills is noted as being one of the largest congregations in existence. Rick Atchley is said to use the New International Version (NIV) Bible in his work. He has managed to convince some fifteen of about seventeen elders to allow a Saturday worship assembly where instrumental music and communion are an ongoing part.

Naomi Walters (Harding Graduate School of Religion) Stamford Church of Christ in Stamford, Connecticut. A woman has been hired as a Minister in Residence to preach for that congregation. The regular preacher at that congregation "justified" that decision (without any Scripture, of course). "It just seemed right to him," he said. But what did Paul have to say? "*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law*" (1 Cor. 14:34).

Lauren King (David Lipscomb University) Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee. A woman who has been hired as a preacher and justified by the local minister by his reinterpreting some of Paul's teaching regarding a woman's rightful place in the church. It seems keeping up with the times is important to him and those he leads.

In our immediate area of West Virginia there are congregations that have a band, use women in worship activities, offer communion on alternate days, use TV shows and other activities that are contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10).

Of grave concern is the direction many "preacher schools" have taken in recent times. Fewer are the number who train Gospel preachers that can and will "seek the lost" for which Jesus died (Luke 19:10) and who "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3). Instead, they are following the way of the religious world both in thought and practice. Furthermore, congregations, especially the larger ones, are insisting on ministers that have capital letters after their name. What can we conclude but that "the Bible is simply not enough for some."

Not to be overlooked in all this is the lackadaisical attitude and performance (or lack thereof) of many of those who call themselves ministers of churches of Christ today. Many have reinterpreted the command to "go" (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Rom. 10:13-15) as "come and stay" and never venturing outside. Church growth is a natural product of conversions (Acts 2:38,41,47) which are a product of preaching the Word to alien sinners (Rom. 1:16).

There is a general lack of "earnestly contending for the faith" (Jude 3). The Lord's church of today no longer enjoys that great presence in society of just one or two generations ago. "*Reprove, rebuke and exhort*" (2 Tim. 4:2) is generally avoided so as not to offend anyone. Elders knowingly allow situations to exist lest the congregation be split. Matthew 7:15-23 will not be welcome words for many on that last great day! Jesus said, "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of this-*

... Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither [can] a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

While many individuals and congregations have departed from the "one faith" and many others are yet departing, what about you, where do you stand?

What is wrong with the church of Christ we read about in the New Testament? There is absolutely nothing wrong with the church of Christ we read of in the Bible and that exists in the world today because it was built by Christ Himself (Matt. 16:18). It is of God and not of man. It is the one for which Christ will be returning when time on earth is no more (1 Thess. 4:14-18). He has not promised to return for and accept any other. It is the one and only one that will live eternally with Him in Heaven (1 Thess. 4:17). He has not promised to save any other. And, anyone wishing to go to Heaven when this life is over must of necessity align himself/herself with His church, the church of Christ. So why wait? We often sing the song "*Why do you wait?*" as an encouragement to those who need to comply to the Lord's commands. We need to remember that no other will stand the test on that great day.

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CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM #3: PROPHETS

Adam Good

Since miracles confirmed a true apostle, what does the absence of miracles say about Muhammad, the self-proclaimed apostle of Allah?

A major difference between Christianity and Islam is their presentation of prophets. The God of the Bible always confirmed the word of His messengers. He empowered them to perform undeniable miracles and through them revealed prophecies concerning the future. Without such evidence, the people were to reject anyone who claimed to be from God. If Allah is another name for Jehovah, then he should operate in the same way. The *Qur'an* should be filled with the miracles and the prophecies of Muhammad. If he is truly the final prophet with the greatest revelation ever given, then surely he would have been divinely confirmed in spectacular ways. Yet, the *Qur'an* contains nothing that substantiates Muhammad's claim to be a prophet. Instead, it calls for blind faith and resorts to threats against unbelievers. This is not the God of the Bible. Jehovah supplies mankind with evidence upon which to build their faith. He does not desire the worship of cowed, ignorant slaves, but a restoration of fellowship with those He lovingly made in His own image (1 Cor. 1:9; Gen. 1:26).

God appeared to Moses in "a flame of fire from the midst of a bush" (Exodus 3:2). Jehovah informed the trembling shepherd that he had been chosen as the one through whom Israel would be delivered. Moses began giving reasons (actually excuses) as to why God should choose someone else for the task. He asked "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee" (Exodus 4:1). Jehovah supplied Moses with three miracles to convince the people.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses addressed the Israelites for the last time. He foretold the coming of Jesus the Christ who, like himself, would serve as a mediator between

God and man (Deut. 18:17-19). Moses then gave a way to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet. "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that [is] the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, [but] the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). This same test is the basis for God's assurance to Ezekiel, "when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them" (Ezek. 33:33). During the period of the judges, "the word of the LORD was precious in those days; [there was] no open vision." Then God spoke to a young man in the middle of the night. "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel [was] established [to be] a prophet of the LORD" (1 Sam. 3:1,19-20). How did Israel know that God had chosen Samuel as His mouthpiece? The Lord gave them evidence.

In the New Testament, God continued to confirm His true servants. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2:11). Jesus urged a disciple to recognize that His teachings came from the Father. If the disciple still doubted, the Lord said "...believe me for the very works' sake" (John 14:11). After the Lord's ascension into heaven, the apostles "...went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with [them], and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). The Hebrew writer described the great salvation "...which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard [him]; God also bearing [them] witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers mira-

cles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost..." (Heb. 2:3-4).

Christianity is a religion confirmed from heaven above. What of Muhammad and Islam? Muhammad recognized a difference between himself and the former prophets. "There was no prophet among the prophets but was given miracles because of which people had security or had belief, but what I was given was the Divine Inspiration which Allah revealed to me. So I hope that my followers will be more than those of any other prophet on the Day of Resurrection" (Bukhari 7274). Muhammad specifically acknowledged, "Jesus came with clear signs" (Surah 43:63). Although the *Qur'an* records several accounts of people asking Muhammad to perform a miracle, it never attributes a single sign to him.

After Muhammad preached to a Jewish community, they responded "Verily, Allah has taken our promise not to believe in any Messenger unless he brings to us an offering which the fire (from heaven) shall devour." Muhammad responded "verily, there came to you Messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you speak of; why then did you kill them, if you are truthful" (Surah 3:183)? Although Muhammad correctly charged the Jews with killing the prophets, their guilt does not exempt him from proving his own claim.

The *Qur'an* impresses upon its readers Muhammad's status as an ordinary man. When unbelievers asked "Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord," Muhammad responded, "Allah is certainly able to send down a sign" (Surah 6:37). Would anyone be convinced to adopt a new faith by such an answer? Another passage records Allah informing Muhammad "if you were able to seek a tunnel in the ground or a ladder to the sky, so that you may bring them a sign (and you cannot do it, so be patient)"

(Surah 6:35). In Surah 17:90, unbelievers declared “We shall not believe in you (O Muhammad), until you cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us.” In verses 91-93, the people suggested other miracles that Muhammad could perform in order to convince them to accept Islam. When pressed to prove himself, Muhammad confessed “Am I anything but a man, sent as a Messenger?” Others wondered “Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses” (Surah 28:48)? The *Qur’an* incredibly states “And they say: ‘Why are not signs sent down to him from his Lord?’ Say: ‘The signs are only with Allah, and I am only a plain warner.’ Is it not sufficient for them that We have sent down to you the Book (the *Qur’an*) which is recited to them” (Surah 29:50-51)? Muhammad argued that mankind should take the existence of the *Qur’an* as proof of his divine inspiration. Is this not circular reasoning? The *Qur’an* is divinely inspired because it claims that it is divinely inspired?

The *Qur’an* offers no evidence to support its claims. It presents Muhammad as a mere man who did nothing to prove that he possessed divine inspiration. The apostle Paul demonstrated that God had sent him. “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). If miracles confirmed a true apostle, what does the absence of signs say about Muhammad, the self-proclaimed apostle of Allah? Paul answers this question. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9).

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One of the most neglected commandments of the Bible is Jude 3 where all Christians are exhorted to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. The Gospel is to be defended and sounded forth in all the world. Are you standing up for the Truth and defending it?

WILLFULLY FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLIES

Ivie Powell

When growing up, I heard many sermons on the sin of willfully forsaking the assembly. At the close of a great many invitations, many would respond confessing the sin of forsaking the assembly and requesting the prayers of the saints and to be restored. Here we are, lo these many years, and seldom if ever do brethren hear such messages, along with a number of other doctrinal subjects. The abandoning of doctrinal preaching is directly linked to elders and preachers! That the world has invaded the Lord’s church in far too many places is an undeniable fact! When congregations dismiss Sunday evening services for the Super Bowl, and other worldly holidays, they demonstrate a lack of spirituality! Furthermore, when preachers state it is legalistic to oppose such departures from the faith speaks volumes about them! No one is entitled to directly or indirectly preach any doctrine that undermines truth!

When it comes to willfully forsaking the assembly, it is very evident many brethren do not believe it is a sin. How can any sincere Christian think for a moment they are setting their “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2) by willfully forsaking the assembly?

There is no question that the path to complete apostasy deals with our mind-set toward God and His word! The Lord gives warning after warning in the book of Hebrews, lest we depart from the faith. Hear the word of the Lord, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13). Brethren will you “hear his voice” as the Lord speaks to us though His inspired word?

I am told that the word “forsaking” is a present participle, which indicates that the meaning is, “do not keep on forsaking the assembling of yourselves.” When one reads Hebrews 10:25-29, they quickly see the consequences of continually “forsaking the assembling of yourselves together!” A commentary on what takes place by continually forsaking the assembly is Hebrews 2:1, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” [The American Standard Version states, “lest haply we drift away from them.”] Note, drifting always leads away from God!

When children of God willfully forsake the assembling of the saints, observe, please, what takes place:

- They demonstrate a rebellious attitude toward God’s command to assemble with the saints (Heb. 10:25).
- They fail to partake of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7).
- They Disobey the command to give as they had been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- They have set a poor example which could well lead others, perhaps their own family, to drift away from the Lord (Matt. 5:13-16).
- They are turning their nose up at God’s Word (Gal. 6:7-8).
- They are merely giving lip service while their heart is far from God (Matt. 15:8).
- They are neglecting valuable lessons taught from God’s Word (Acts 2:42).
- They are not receiving the strength derived from collectively assembling with the saints (Heb. 10:23-25).
- They are failing to stay prepared to meet God (Mark 13:32-37).
- Unless they repent and are restored, they are well on the road to completely leaving the faith (Heb. 2:1; 3:12,13,15).

It is indeed a very serious matter when Christians refuse to assemble with the saints. Remember, any sin not repented of will cause one to be eternally lost (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31)!

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Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the **Leoni Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is FREE, being supported by the contributions of both individuals and congregations. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3, 2 Tim. 4:2, Titus 1:13, Titus 2:1 and 2 Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless it is marked “not for publication.” The church building is located at: 6818 McMinnville Hwy, Woodbury, TN 37190.

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