

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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THE SILENCE OF GOD

A. W. Dicus (1888-1978)

"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence" (Psalm 50:21)

Volumes have been written and numerous sermons preached about the words and commands of God, but in this age of religious controversy, it seems that little attention has been given to His silence. With slight reflection, we are aware that when God speaks, He speaks with power and authority. By His word, the things that now are, sprang into existence; the planets moved in their respective orbits and even man became a living soul. Natural laws ceased to function as evidenced in the burning bush, the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea, the flowing stream from the smitten rock and the prolongation of the solar day while Joshua finished the battle. Thus the laws of nature apparently began instantaneously when He spake and as suddenly ceased by the same power. By such came life and by such life ends. With equal sudden rapidity, we are assured that the dead will appear, the transformation will take place and eternity will be ushered in for it will be in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of the voice of God. However, it is not the commands of God that men fear but God himself and His divine presence.

When God speaks, man stands in awe. Israel, while waiting God's commands, pleaded that such be given indirectly through Moses for they feared His presence (Exodus 20:19). It was then that Moses rebuked the people and said, "Fear not: for God is

come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." It is not during the moments of God's presence that men are rebellious, contentious, neglectful, unthankful and fearless, but during the lapse of time between His appearances.

It is not during the uttering of God's holy and divine commands that man questions, rejects or disobeys, but during the intervals of silence while the merciful God is longsuffering, waiting for man to repent. Here the psalmist visualizes God as the Great Judge. *"He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself"* (Psalm 50:4-6). Then in verses 1, 2 and 3: *"The mighty God even the Lord hath spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof, out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence, a fire shall devour before him and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him."* Thus the prophet summons the court, presents the judge, produces the witnesses, cites those who are to answer and, having seated the judge upon the throne, he gives forth the charge. Then will be broken the deep silence that now penetrates the heart of

every submissive child and disturbs the mind of every rebellious objector. Where will be the place? "Out of Zion." Who are to be cited? "Those that have a covenant with Him," which dates from the offering of Abel. What will be the charge? "I am God," the only object or being of worship; "I am thy God," which demands complete subjection. "I will speak," which forestalls any argument or anticipated deliberation.

It is during the long periods of silence between the successive appearances of God, that men have always permitted their spark of faith to grow dim, thus permitting their religions to become corrupted and suffering themselves to drift into a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. It is during such periods that men have forgotten God. Man, with the greatest of his ability and theological reasoning, has searched the Bible, striving to understand and to teach the commands of God, but in sorrow he has neglected to reflect upon the periods of God's silence: and the results of such intervals upon the eternal destiny of the soul.

I. *The Silence of God is an expression of His infinite wisdom and a distinct proof of His divinity.*

God spake and the worlds were formed. Natural laws were postulat-

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The Silence of God...



Guest Editorial

GOD'S POWER UNTO SALVATION

Perry B. Cotham

As the apostle Paul neared the end of his third missionary journey, he wrote a letter to the church in Rome, the capital of the great Roman Empire. The wicked Nero was then the emperor of this vast empire. In the beginning of the letter Paul stated: *"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:14-16).

Notice the "I am's" in this reading:

1. *"I am debtor."* Paul realized he had been saved from sin and that he had an obligation to all men as far as possible to preach to them the Gospel of Christ. This is what Christ wanted him to do (cf. Acts 26:16-18; I Tim. 1:12-14), and he selected him to be an apostle especially unto the Gentiles. He had many dear friends already in Rome (Rom. 16:3-15; 15:18-24).

2. *"I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."* He was at this time ready and anxious to go to Rome.

3. *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."* The word "gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings." Why was he not ashamed of the Gospel? It is "the power" not "a power" or "one of the powers," but the only power that God uses for man's salvation. Since this was true, Paul was willing to suffer the trials of life, even imprisonment in order that he might go and preach this glorious message for man's soul's salvation. God has made no other provisions for the salvation of the world than through the Gospel, the word of God. Salvation through the Gospel comes only to those who believe it, and it must be an obedient faith, not "faith only" (Mark 16:15-16; Rom 1:5;

16:26; James 2:24). The Gospel comes first to the Jews, afterwards to the Gentiles. In the Gospel is God's plan of making men righteous, which is by faith, and it is revealed to produce faith. Young men today are especially urged to know and to teach (preach) this divinely given Gospel message to the whole world; they are greatly needed to do this work in this good nation as well as in other parts of the world. No one should ever be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, yet some people are ashamed of the Gospel; but not so for Paul. Really, this statement is the theme of this letter. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel, *"For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."* It is the power appointed of God for the salvation of all! So we must emphasize that the power by which God saves men is the Gospel, the message of God's redeeming love for all mankind.

ALL SCRIPTURE DIVINELY INSPIRED

Many people in the religious world do not teach and believe that the Gospel is God's power for saving men. They think that in *conviction* and *conversion*, there must first be a direct work of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner. Many have been the prayers for God to "send the converting power down and save these sinners now." Many have been the debates and sermons to teach people that the Gospel — the inspired word of God — is God's power for salvation; that God has no other power to save.

In the Bible, we do not read of any inspired man telling his auditors that they must have a direct work of the Spirit to enable them to obey the Lord and be saved. But the Scriptures clearly teach that the Holy Spirit always operates upon man's heart through the word and only through the word. The Bible does not

teach a direct, mysterious, operation of the Spirit for salvation in addition to and distinct from God's word. The Holy Spirit inspired men to give to us the Scriptures: *"...holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"* (II Peter 1:21).

THE SPIRIT AND HIS INSTRUMENT

A misconception of the Holy Spirit and His work leads to all kinds of religious errors. The Holy Spirit is a divine Person of the God-head. He is one with the Father and the Son (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20). There's one God who consists of three distinct personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; John 1:1-3,14).

Christ, before He left this earth to return to the Father, promised the power or influence of the Holy Spirit to the apostles to guide them into all the truth (John 16:13; Luke 24:49). The baptism of the Holy Spirit came to the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). They, guided by the Spirit, preached to the people, and the Bible says, *"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart"* (Acts 2:37). Thus, by the words of the Spirit given by Peter, the people were made believers and were told what to do to be saved.

Later, the Holy Spirit inspired and guided men to give God's complete and perfect will. Paul wrote: *"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). The Bible is, therefore, the perfect **and** complete will of God.

The examples of conversion in the Book of Acts show clearly how the Holy Spirit operates upon the sinner in conversion. On the day of Pentecost, the people heard, believed and obeyed the Spirit's message given by Peter (Acts 2:36-38). The Ethiopian officer heard and believed the Gospel teaching about Christ, confessed his faith in the Lord, and was baptized, and then went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:35-39). Lydia and her household and the jailer and his household heard the Gospel and obeyed the Lord and were saved from their sins (Acts 16:1-14, 25-34). The Word of God is the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph.

6:17). So the Spirit influenced them, but not in a direct manner — He used His sword. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Gospel, God’s inspired word, is the instrument. Note the example: “Mr. Doe cuts down his tree with an axe.” Doe cuts down the tree — the axe cuts down the tree. Doe, a person, exerts his power indirectly through an instrument to cut down the tree. Now apply this illustration to the teaching of the Bible concerning God’s power for man’s conversion.

The Gospel is the instrument which the Holy Spirit always uses in His work of Christian conversion and leading and directing the child of God to go to heaven. Note these statements teaching this:

1. One must be born of the Spirit (John 3:5). But how? It is through the Word: “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, By the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever*” (I Peter 1:23). “*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*” (James 1:18). “*For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*” (I Cor. 4:15). So, where an act is said to have been performed by a person and by a certain instrument, it is clearly understood that the person did the “act” but used the instrument as a “means.”

2. A person is “quickenened” by the Spirit through the Word. “*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1). “*...For thy word hath quickened me*” (Psalm 119:5; 93). “*It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life*” (John 6:63).

3. One is converted by the perfect law of God: “*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*” (Psalm 19:7). “*...Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). “*...Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (Acts 11:14).

4. Faith comes by hearing the word: “*So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17; cf. John 20:30-31; Acts 15:7).

5. Freedom comes through the truth: “*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32).

6. A person is called by the Gospel: “*whereunto he called you by*

my gospel” (II Thess. 2:14).

7. A person is drawn to the Lord by the teaching of the word: “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him... and they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*” (John 6:44-45).

8. One is made clean through obedience to the Lord’s teaching: “*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you*” (John 15:3; cf. Psalm 119:9).

9. One is sanctified by the Lord in obedience to the word: “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth*” (John 17:17; cf. I Cor. 6:11).

10. One is purified in his soul by obedience to the truth: “*seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth...*” (I Peter 1:22).

11. The word of God gives light to direct us in living the Christian life: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Psalm 119:105). “*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple*” (Psalm 119:130), “*The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes*” (Psalm 19:8). “*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory*” (Psalm 73:24). “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*” (Rom. 8:14; Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16).

12. The word of God is food to the soul that children of God may feed upon and grow thereby: “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4). “*I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32). “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*” (I Peter 2:2). By obedience to the inspired word of God, Christians have the fruit bearing influence of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

13. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells indirectly in the hearts of all the children of God through their obedience to the word, as does Christ and the Father: “*That he would grant you, ... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith*” (Eph. 3:16-17).

“*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27). “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 2:5). “*If we love one another, God dwelleth in us*” (I John 4:12; cf. vs.13,15). “*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him*” (I John 4:16). “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*” (I Cor. 3:16)? “*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own*” (I Cor. 6:19)?

There is no personal, direct indwelling of God the Father or of Christ or of the Holy Spirit in the heart of God’s obedient children. It is an indirect indwelling through the word. The Gospel is God’s power to save. There is no additional power or influence, in a direct way, in addition to, or in conjunction with, God’s word, that is given to man for his soul’s salvation. The Holy Spirit indwells the child of God only through the inspired word. Hence, Paul’s admonition to Timothy was that he should always Preach the Word (II Tim. 4:1-4)! The seven men who were selected to wait on tables in the Jerusalem church were men “full of faith and the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:3-5), but later, Stephen, of the number, and Philip, did miracles, having received miraculous gifts from the apostles (Acts 6:8; 8:5-18). So they were full of the Holy Spirit in the ordinary way but received miraculous powers when the hands of the apostles were laid upon them.

14. The parable of the Sower teaches the absolute necessity of the word of God for salvation. Neither in the natural realm nor in the spiritual realm can there be life without seed. The word is the seed of the Kingdom: “*The seed is the word of God*” (Luke 8:11). Christians cannot be made without planting the seed in the hearts of men.

CONCLUSION

The Lord at the close of every one of the seven letters to the churches of Asia said: “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*” (Rev. 2:7). The Lord has

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God’s Power...

The Silence of God...

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ed, material things sprang into existence and then the voice of God became silent in nature. From that day until the present, the natural laws have remained fixed. Men have denied, rejected, tried to refute and have even claimed to set such laws aside but God remains silent. It is this penetrating silence that alarms the Atheists, the Deists, and the Agnostics, until they demand aloud for an answer from God. They cry for supernatural evidence which, failing to get, they deceive their followers with religious superstitions. Their works are mysteries of deception. They profess to appear as medians and even promise to return after death, but God remains silent. Why should God speak? He spoke as one of authority. Such men of assumed intellect have never disproved this authority. This unbroken silence has forced the ablest of scientists to admit that "matter cannot be created nor destroyed." *"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork,"* all of which came by the voice of God (Psalm 19:1).

Why should there be repeated manifestations of such power to prove God's divinity? Such power does not need to be verified. Scientists have not disproved evidence of such powers and until he is able to do so, God's silence is indicative of His infinite wisdom. Wise men are men of few words and true science requires but little or no justification. The more explanation that a theory requires the less the possibility of its being true. Denying another's statement does not prove one that we might make, neither does denying the infallibility of the Bible prove men's theories of science. True scientists will not resort to such tactics. As men cannot disprove God's statements, it is wise and just that God remains silent. Such silence is indicative of divine proof.

II. *God's silence is a proof of the Infallibility of the Bible and indicative of God's Infinite wisdom in religion.*

In Hebrews 1:1 we read, *"God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the*

fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." In the Mount of Transfiguration God spake, *"This is my beloved Son, hear ye him."* Then the voice of God became silent.

Christ, before His ascension, spake the commands of God by which Christians were to be directed and then after informing the disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit to reveal these commands, the voice of Christ became silent.

The Holy Spirit came as promised. The commands of Christ were revealed to the apostles as the Spirit gave them utterance. The Holy Spirit then became silent.

In the New Testament we have these commands, given by Christ and revealed by the Holy Spirit each in their respective turn. It is a reflection on the infinite wisdom of the Godhead to request or to even contend for a direct revelation of guidance by either God, Christ or the Holy Spirit. Such revelation, should one be given, would cast doubt on the one already given. Some claim a special message from the Holy Spirit. Others contend that they are guided directly by the Lord. Others seem inclined to believe that God puts such directly in their hearts while many seem possessed with the illusion that the guarding angel is ever near to direct them in right or wrong. All such conceptions are certainly without faith. Neither of them would be accepted by a court of justice nor recognized as evidence in any discussion. One would not think of accepting such as authority in a material transaction.

To demand or even expect a direct revelation is to reject the one given in the New Testament. This intimates, at least, the incapacity of the New Testament to do what God, Christ and the Holy Spirit unitedly designed, advocated and fulfilled that it would do, hence, a reflection on the wisdom of the Godhead.

The Godhead is silent. Why? Because He has spoken. Having spoken with authority, there is no need of repetition or explanation. A repetition would not add to the clearness, neither would additional information increase man's possibilities, for that already given is thorough (See Col. 2:9; II Tim. 3:17). The only reason left for such contention is to escape what

is written. It is the unbroken silence that causes man's uneasiness. It is this unbroken silence that causes man to become careless and indifferent toward that already spoken. The psalmist David foresaw this situation for we read in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of this psalm (Psalm 50): *"But unto the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in my mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind me."* Then in verse twenty-one, we read, *"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes, now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver."* God spake then. He is silent now. God warned, and even prophesied the situation as it now is; that man would take His words into his own mouth, that they would hate His instruction and cast it behind them, but through all this He would keep silent.

When men ask God to speak, are they asking Him to break this promise? Would it not be advisable to meditate beforehand, to at least wonder what God might say, should He speak? Is it probable that He would say, "Well done," when we have not done what He commanded or probably done differently from what He commanded, when we have requested a special guidance and thus questioned His infinite wisdom to thoroughly do what He designed to do? When men seriously reflect on what God might say, should He speak, they will pray for Him to remain silent until they can repent and accept what He said when He did speak, for this is the divine purpose of His silence.

III. *God's silence is indicative of His infinite compassion and divine mercy.*

He is exceedingly merciful, slow to anger and omniscient. Although nothing escapes the divine eye, yet He remains silent and continues to bestow blessings upon men. *"The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord and He pondereth on all his goings"* (Prov. 5:21). He endures the provocation of the ungodly and defers from day to day, from year to year,

the deserved punishment. God is longsuffering to usward and in silence He manifests His divine mercy, while He waits for repentance. This present life is a season of prohibition, a period for reforming. It is not a silence in which God will suffer His way to be altered but a silence of waiting for men to conform to His way. Why do men fear the judgment? Because they know that then the days of probation will be ended. Why do men not fear the calm of His silence before the judgment? This question is answered in Ecclesiastes 8:11, which reads, *“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”*

How long God will continue this compassionate silence is uncertain both to men and angels but it will terminate with incomprehensible speed. What shall He then say to those who have taken His covenant out of God’s mouth, who have discarded the New Testament because they hated instruction, and who have changed the Word of God into deception? Ezekiel says in the thirteenth chapter, *“They have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? ... So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD”* (vs.6-7,14).

It is this silence that is indicative of His divine mercy, for when He speaks, as the psalmist says, “He will reprove the wicked and tear into pieces those that forget God and there will be none to deliver.” Is it any wonder that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? When humble servants of the Most High God and disciples of His obedient Son realize that heartfelt religion is not New Testament religion and that a Christian is a follower of Christ and not an advisor nor even a counselor, then men will pray for God to prolong His merciful silence until they repent rather than pray for some visible manifestation of His divine presence.

It is God’s desire to remain silent. Why should we wish it otherwise. If men will not heed that which He has spoken, what assurance does God have that he will heed a direct revelation should one be given? Did not the rich man plead that a direct messenger be sent to his erring brothers? Do we not remember the heavenly answer: *“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rose from the dead”* (Luke 16:31).

The decision has been made and the destiny sealed. Alterations are not to be accepted. Thus it was with Pilate when he said, *“What I have written, I have written.”* Neither are alterations to be expected in the divine decisions. What God has written, he has written. What faith or hope could a believer have, if such were subject to alteration? With what certainty could one plan for eternity if it were not for the fact that *“with Him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning?”*

There is no need for another revelation. It is then the silence of God that is indicative of His infinite compassion and divine mercy which inspires our faith and hope in the eternal promises.

IV. *The silence of God is a Judicial Inflection.*

The wretched Saul, king of Israel, though leader of the people of God, rejected God’s warnings. In his misery and grief, he approached the prophet with the complaint, “God has departed from me and answereth me no more.”

Herod was an eager listener of John. He had done many things but he had not surrendered his heart. The time came when rather than slay his lusts with a repentant heart, he consented to the slaying of the prophet. The blood of the saint was upon his hands and the guilt of the sin upon his conscience. The dreadful silence was eased by the thought of seeing Jesus, but Jesus answered him nothing, nothing to satisfy this curiosity, nothing to alarm his fears, nothing to enlighten this mind. *“As a lamb he was led to the slaughter, as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth”* (Isa. 53:7). This dreaded silence added pain to torture. Christ was silent before the mob, silent before the Jewish council and silent before the Roman gover-

nor. The silence increased the torture of a guilty conscience. Pilate, though he washed his hands in a pretense of innocence and denied the guilt, yet he marveled at his silence.

When our present days of probation are over, the unbelieving cry in agony and the contentious worshiper will plead, “Lord in thy name I have done many wonderful works,” as he awakens to the dreadful realization that the merciful God “has departed and answereth no more.” Sorrow will be added to grief and torture to misery as they suffer the infliction of the eternal silence. “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The silence of God is an expression of His infinite wisdom, a proof of His divinity. It is indicative of His infinite wisdom in religion, of His infinite compassion and mercy and will be evidence of His judicial infliction. It is during the present silence of our earthly pilgrimage and not the eternal silence, that we are subjects of this divine mercy. The eternal silence will be a rendering of justice.

God has spoken, all of which can be found in the New Testament. No further verification is necessary. If such were granted, it is reasonable to believe that He would speak to the uninformed heathen and not to people surrounded with innumerable copies of the Bible. His silence does not warrant man’s introduction of creeds, doctrines or opinions. God said, “repent and be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38). Man says baptism is not essential.

Because God remains silent is no indication that he will warrant man’s statement. Rather it is indicative of the fact that He will not alter the one that He has made. The same is true of every command in the New Testament.

From THE BIBLE BANNER
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Author of the song
“Our God, He Is Alive”

If you have moved, you will no longer receive the paper unless you send us your new address. Or, if you no longer wish to receive the paper, please tell us.

DIVIDING THE CHURCH?

Roelf L. Ruffner

It amazes me to see the lengths some brethren will go in our lawless age in the name of “church growth.” Some build gymnasiums and offer free hotdogs and hamburgers to attract people to the church building. Others will offer seminars on personal finances. Unfortunately, many more avoid teaching/preaching on controversial doctrines (aren’t they all!) in the Bible so as not to offend the “seeker.”

For nearly twenty years some denominations have concentrated on “small group ministry” or “cells” to swell their numbers. They usually do this in lieu of Sunday night worship at their building. Instead of assembling together as the body of Christ on Sunday nights, they all break up into groups or cells and meet at different members’ homes for Bible study, worship and socializing. Even some of our own brethren have resorted to this approach except they maintain a small devotional at the church building on Sunday nights for “traditionalists” and those who wish to partake of the Lord’s supper.

Proponents of this view, especially among brethren, say this approach is “Biblical” and point to numerous references in the New Testament which indicates that the early church of Christ met in homes. They maintain that they have only “rediscovered” an approach the early church used for church growth. This is false. Of course the early church met in homes, as well as on the banks of rivers, and in the Jewish temple courtyard in Jerusalem. But they did not divide the assembly of the church to do so. Where they met was merely a matter of expediency. The important point is that they met “together” or “assembled” as a congregation for worship.

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25). In one of the many “one another” passages in the New Testament, the

inspired writer not only gives the command to all brethren to assemble, but also gives the reason for it — love. Yet how does a congregation of the saints obey this command when they are splintered into groups and scattered throughout the community? Physically and spiritually it cannot be done.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). This is another “one another” verse which commands the church to sing. It is unaccompanied congregational singing. I sing to you and you sing to me. Again, this command cannot be obeyed if the assembly is divided into what are essentially many different “congregations.” How can I teach and admonish a brother or sister by my singing and they me, when we are physically miles apart?

Some might answer; “we are just trying to interest sinners in the Gospel.” What is wrong with the scriptural way? You can have Bible studies outside the assembly without dividing the assembly. Besides, what are you teaching them about the authority of the Scriptures? Backdoor evangelism or compromise is not the way the early church proclaimed the Gospel “to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23).

Others might add, “but it can cause us to grow closer as a church.” That is what worship is supposed to accomplish. Reread Hebrews 10:24-25. Corporate worship should help to promote love and unity. Does dividing the assembly promote unity? The approved example of the early church was that they prayed together, sang together, contributed of their means together, partook of the Lord’s supper together and heard the words of life together.

Finally, some might say, “this approach has been successful in other places.” It depends upon your definition of “success.” The world equates increased attendance and religious enthusiasm tainted by the

doctrines of men as successful. But God doesn’t! Jesus said, *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God”* (Luke 16:15).

Rather than changing the pattern given us in the New Testament, let us go back to it for guidance in church growth (“Doing Bible things in Bible ways”). Rather than being ashamed of authorized New Testament worship by dividing the assembly, let us faithfully practice it for an unbelieving world to see. Rather than compromising the truth of the Gospel, let us boldly proclaim the old Jerusalem Gospel in all its fullness to our spiritually lost neighbors.

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Wards Chapel church of Christ, Manchester, TN	\$25
Harold Wood	\$50
Robert Price	\$400
Anonymous	\$50
Anonymous	\$100
Anonymous (in memory of Sylvia Wright).....	\$100
Chuck & Nancy Verkist.....	\$25
Saks church of Christ, Anniston, AL.....	\$50
Roy Clark	\$25
Edmond & Lucille King (in memory of Sylvia Wright).....	\$50
Guy Grove.....	\$20
Everett Anderson	\$25
Anonymous	\$35
Jimmy & Geraldine Scott.....	\$20
Anonymous	\$300
Anonymous	\$170
Carl Thomsen.....	\$10
Church of Christ, Cushing, OK	\$35
Brent, Tracie, & Adeline Travis (in memory of Sylvia Wright).....	\$20
Ronald H. Allen.....	\$30
Berea church of Christ, McMinnville, TN	\$100
John H. Brown	\$25
Berea church of Christ, Rives, TN	\$100
Srygley church of Christ, Tusculumbia, AL.....	\$50
Thurman & Nellie Dull	\$50
Beginning Balance.....	\$6,674.16
Contributions.....	1,905.00
Debits	
Paper	1,350.00
Postage	1,292.50
Supplies.....	206.14
Ending Balance.....	\$ 5,730.52

BIG TIME — A BIG MISTAKE

Rusty Stark

Truly spiritual men and women have long recognized the great value in the general assembly of adults and children for orderly, formal worship of the God of heaven.

According to an announcement dated January 10, 2005, the **Farmers Branch Church of Christ** (Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex) has launched a new “children’s ministry” called “Big Time.” “Big Time” is a program that “uses leading-edge Christian music, drama, and video linked to Bible principles.” It is designed for parents and children to experience together, and its proponents hope to use it to bring in “unchurched” people.

“Big Time” consists of 15 segments packed into 45 minutes, and is sure to appeal to our modern society with its attention deficit. Eddie Plemmons is the “Children’s Minister” at Farmers Branch. He claims that “Big Time” is unique because “we are the only local church that provides a ministry which targets both children and parents in the same setting.”

“BIG TIME”

A BIG MISTAKE IN DEPARTING FROM GOD’S PATTERN

The idea that the Farmer’s Branch church is unique in offering a religious experience that targets both children and parents is mistaken. The Bible commands a general assembly of the saints in which a congregation meets together every first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:17–16:2). The Farmer’s Branch Church doesn’t believe in this Bible pattern, instead, they offer a “contemporary” worship service on Saturday nights and two “traditional” services on Sunday morning. If they followed the Bible pattern, all of the families involved would come together for worship and experience the same things together. Every church that is faithful to the pattern has a religious experience for all ages together. And truly spiritual men and women have long recognized the great value in this general assembly of adults and children for orderly, for-

mal worship of the God of heaven.

“BIG TIME”

NOT A NEW MISTAKE, AN OLD ONE

Like Jereboam the son of Nebat, the perpetrators of “Big Time” are encouraging Israel to worship idols (I Kings 12:26-33). When people come together for a sporting-event, concert atmosphere, it is not worship to Almighty God. Almighty God demands to be worshiped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40).

No, when men use sensationalism to draw a crowd they are bowing at the feet of the entertainment god. And, just like Jereboam, they are doing so in a way that they devised out of their own hearts (I Kings 12:33). It is an age-old problem that began with Cain (Gen. 4:1-7; Heb. 11:4; I John 3:12). And, it is a problem that makes worship vain and empty (Matt. 15:9).

“BIG TIME”

A BIG MISTAKE THAT COMES FROM A LACK OF FAITH

So what’s wrong with the old Bible pattern? It simply isn’t exciting enough. It is not fast paced, not dramatic, and not sensational enough. Those who create such things declare plainly their lack of faith in the Gospel, God’s saving power (Rom. 1:16).

It doesn’t matter if they deny it or not, those who feel the need to dress the Gospel up in *drama* and *excitement* do not believe that the message of God is the power of God unto salvation. The simple Gospel was good enough for Paul to take to sinful Ephesus and it was good enough for Peter to take to Cornelius, but somehow modern religious leaders are convinced it isn’t good enough for today’s unchurched masses. They seek drama and sensationalism. Forgetting the substance, they cry out

for a new, exciting form!

Such arrogant, blind unbelief is surely a big mistake — one with eternal consequences.

*1495 E Empire Ave.
Benton Harbor, MI 49022*

God’s Power...

(Continued from page 33)

given to man in his word “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (II Peter 1:3). The Bible is an all sufficient guide to man in all his religious duties. There is not a single step that a person is called upon to take from the time he leaves the world of sin until at last he enters heaven, the eternal home of the soul, that is not affected by the teaching of God’s word in the Bible, the only divinely given rule of faith and practice. The Gospel, as it is, is able to save man as he is, when he obeys it, and the Gospel is the medium through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work.

At the final day of judgment, all people will be judged by the word, Jesus said: “*...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48; cf. II Cor. 5:10). It is not what you say or I say or what someone else says that counts; it is what God’s word says. It is the final authority. The Bible is our only guide in religious faith and practice. Although we live more than nineteen hundred years since the Lord’s church was established and people became Christians by their obedience to the inspired word of God, people today can, by following the same pattern as was taught to those early disciples of Christ, be the same true church of our Lord. The word of God, when obeyed, will produce today what it produced in the beginning.

The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation.

*1814 Santa Cruz
Grand Prairie, TX 75051*



SEEK THE OLD PATHS

make defense of the Gospel of our Lord (Phil. 1:7,17). It is pleasing to be assured that there are others that have not 'bowed unto Baal' (I Kings 19:18). Though the number would seem small, yet the Lord's way will last even though the enemy be as a great host that would compass about the city of the living God (II Kings 6:14-16). My soul is sorrowed knowing that at least two congregations in which I have labored in times past (about 5 years in each) have now followed in the ways of liberal thinkers. As I read your March issue and finished with the "HERE AND THERE" section concerning Rick Atchley's 1990 sermon, I felt compelled to share with you (for what ever it might be worth) some thoughts that I have used in talking with some who have followed such teaching. It is quite evident that it is by grace (Eph. 2:8-9) that 'moral' errors are covered in the same way that 'doctrinal' errors can be forgiven. But as Paul demands in Romans 6:1-2, that forgiveness can only come when we are dead to them. This of course would include both 'moral' and 'doctrinal' error. And then in the letter to Titus the apostle states that grace teaches us that there is a denying that which is of the world's lusts (does my will above God's fit this?) and live soberly, righteously and godly (2:11-12). The same grace that covers moral error will cover doctrinal error, but the same responsibility follows. That responsibility is REPENTANCE! We live in one of the strong-holds of the new movement, in fact the "SOUL WINNING WORKSHOP" ???) of Tulsa is in our back yard and hundreds (if not thousands) will flock to hear speakers who will undoubtedly continue to preach the same kind of things Mr. Atchely presented 15 years ago" **...Ralph Hunter, Owasso, OK.** "We at Plumerville church of Christ greatly appreciate your willingness to send us a bundle for our monthly distribution. These are passed out to every member to read. This is greatly needed in the brotherhood today. We need more publications *just like yours*. Our preacher, Jock Lawyer and our congregation want you to know how we appreciate your hard work — being able to rightly divide the word of God. This is the best publication on 'Bible Truth' I have ever seen. It is needed so much in our churches and society today" **...Reba Chism Miller, Plumerville, AR.** "Your paper is so very, very much needed today. Thank you so much. I'd like to respond to an article in the Feb./2005 issue entitled "To Whom Shall We Sing Praises" by Rusty Stark. I definitely agree with him, but I would like to add another song that is extremely popular, "Precious Memories." If you look at the words of this song, it is not about God, it is about our mothers and fathers and childhood memories. If we are singing with the spirit and understanding, we should not be singing this song in worship. I've had people justify it because of the title. But don't people pay attention to the words we are singing? It is not 'precious memories' about Christ's death, but about our earthly father and mother and homes, relatives and childhood memories. Thank you" **...Wanda Clements, Sun City, AZ.** [EDITOR'S NOTE: What you have said about the song "Precious Memories" is correct when it refers to our childhood, parents and home growing up; however, the wording of the song is different in some books and refers to God, Christ and heaven. The point is, let's make sure that we are singing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" in worship to God.] "Just a little something to help with your expenses for sending me your paper. I really enjoy reading good articles. Truth and nothing but the truth. Thank you so much. I would like to remain anonymous" **...McMinnville, TN.** "I certainly hope that you are well! I would like to thank you and all of those who help in the publication of *STOP*. I know that there are many who are involved in the work of this 'truthful' work for Christ and his church. Again, thank you and please continue to fight against those who are against Christ and the truth. It is my prayer and I hope the prayer of every faithful Christian that the truth be not compromised any longer. I think that this is the main problem with the church in our present day. TRUTH is being compromised for any and every reason that can be thought of and then trying to be justified by those compromisers. The main reason is for money. The all mighty dollar is being put above the truth. The church is being turned into a business. Right here in our local area, we see some of the large congregations putting in 'Day Care Centers' to go along with their gymnasiums and fellowship halls that just happen to have basketball goals in them. Oh, this

"Please send me *STOP*. It is a very good paper, true to the Word! Thank you very much" **...Bobby & Lola Senters, Betsy Layne, KY.** "I can not really say that I enjoy reading *Seek The Old Paths*, for it breaks my heart to see what some are doing to the Lord's house. I am however grateful to know that there are brethren that are ready to stand and

is needed to 'pull in' and 'keep in' our young people, they cry. Show me scripture to back this up and then we can say that this is needed. What is needed is for all things to be done as Colossians 3:17 says, '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.' We can come up with so many things that may seem good to man that would fill every pew of every congregation of the Lord's church, but where is the stopping point? As I see it, there seems to be no stopping point. No limit to what man will do to bring in more people (not true disciples). This is all done to bring in more money and to be the biggest congregation in the area. Big numbers do not make a true church of the New Testament. The days of compromising the truth that our Lord and Savior died for must stop if true disciples are to be made through the whole word of God. I'm sorry that I sound so frustrated, but brother, I am. But I'm also encouraged by the true scriptural work that I know is being done and taught throughout this world that our God created and that our Lord is watching over right now. I've received this publication for a good while and truly love to read and study it. Be safe and well in all that you do. Let us love the brotherhood and fear God as I Peter 2:17 tells us. Many profess to love the Lord but Jesus sad, If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). I pray that we will see each day as a day that we can be in obedience to our God and his holy word" **...Greg Barnett, Tuscumbia, AL.** "Dear Christian friends. Thanks so much for sending me *Seek The Old Paths*. You tell it like it is. Some of the churches of Christ are getting more like the denominations. Women should never have authority over man. The church of Christ is true to the scripture here at Wewoka where I attend. Just praying it stays that way. Keep up the good work speaking where the Bible speaks" **...Wilma Danielson, Wewoka, OK.** "We are a new, small, but growing congregation of about 20 families in central Florida and would like to receive a bundle of *STOP* each month. Enclosed is a check to help with mailing costs. Thank you" **...Bob Tyler, Villages Church of Christ, Lady Lake, FL.**

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**

<http://www.seektheoldpaths.org>

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