



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 EXAMPLE OF EZRA

Ronnie Whittemore

Ezra is a well-known Old Testament character. He was a scribe and a priest of the lineage of Eleazar (Ezra 7:12; Neh. 8:1-2). He lived during the Babylonian captivity and became the restorer of worship for the Jews. Ezra chapter seven records the letter of decree issued from Artazerxes (king of the Medo-Persians who possessed world power after the Babylonians) that authorized Ezra and 1,754 other men to return to Jerusalem. In the course of setting things in order, many objectives were set forth. First, silver and gold were carried to Jerusalem to buy animals and other commodities. Second, money was granted from the king's treasury to Ezra. Third, no tax was issued upon the servants of God's house. Fourth, Ezra established judges and magistrates to judge and execute punishment. Fifth, Ezra would do all that God said and do so speedily. So the scene is set with about 50,000 Jews (who had returned earlier) plus the 1,754 with Ezra in Jerusalem. The time was right for the restoration of worship and service to Jehovah.

The key passage of this event is found in Ezra 7:10: *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."*

Within this text are four distinct expressions showing the ACTION of Ezra, the scribe.

HE SET HIS HEART RIGHT

Ezra's first step was to set his

heart right as described by the phrase, "prepared his heart." Solomon wrote, *"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he"* (Prov. 23:7). It is essential that God's people overcome diseases of the heart that would hinder them from fulfilling their responsibilities. Worry, fear, doubt, envy, pride and ingratitude are just a few of the evil dispositions that try to infiltrate the hearts of God's people. The early church was easily identified by a proper heart (Acts 2:37,46; 4:32; 8:37) from which came joy, peace, gladness and unity. Sinners are identified by their wicked hearts from which come lies (Acts 5:32), rebellion (Acts 7:39), and defiance (Acts 7:51). However, concerning Ezra's task, the time had arrived for him and the rest of Judah to serve Jehovah. Ezra knew that in order for this nation to serve God acceptably, he must be the right example. As a priest and scribe, he was in a place of leadership. Therefore, he set his heart right.

HE SOUGHT THE LAW

Ezra's second step was to seek the law as noted by the phrase, *"seek the law of the Lord."* One's heart cannot be right until it is filled with the Word of the Lord (Psa. 119:11; Acts 13:22). God's Word serves as man's guide (Psa. 19:105; John 8:31-32). It is to be desired (1 Peter 2:1-2; Matt. 5:6). God's people should read and study the Word to add knowledge to their faith (2 Peter 1:5-11). Ezra knew that he and the people could not restore

proper worship and service to God without seeking the law of God.

HE SUBMITTED TO THE LAW

Ezra's third step was to submit to the law as designated by the phrase, *"and to do it."* Submission to the law was required of Israel in the past. Moses wrote that the Israelites were promised: *"A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day"* (Deut. 11:27). Prior to their captivity, God urged His people to obey Him: *"But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward"* (Jer. 7:23-24).

The words *obey* and *submit* imply more than just knowledge of God's Word. Nadab and Abihu knew the law, but they were consumed by fire (Lev. 1:1-2). The man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath day knew the law, but he was stoned to death (Num. 15:32-36). The scribes and Pharisees knew the law, but Jesus called them hypocrites (Matt. 15:9; 23:5). Many people today are sincere, but unwilling to obey His commandments; therefore, the Lord does not know them (Matt. 7:21-23). It is

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The Example of Ezra...



Editorial...

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE (How To Get Around GOD'S LAW)

Garland M. Robinson

Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage [is] honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” When God joins a man and woman in holy matrimony, neither the man or the woman has the right to dissolve the union. Jesus said, “What therefore God hath joined together; let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). Therefore, God’s Word concerning marriage is ‘one man, one woman, for life.’

The first three verses of Romans 7 reveals that marriage is for life. “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to [her] husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of [her] husband. So then if, while [her] husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another “man.” The union of marriage remains “intact” until either the man or the woman dies. This is God’s principle concerning marriage. “What therefore God hath joined together; let not man put asunder.”

On the subject of divorce and remarriage, God’s guiding principle is found in Luke 16:18. “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from [her] husband committeth adultery.” The same is said of a wife putting away her husband. “And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another; she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:12). This is clear and cannot be misunderstood. A couple whom God joins in marriage is bound to each other as long as they live (Rom. 7:2-3). To divorce and marry another is adultery (Luke

16:18; Mark 10:12). And, the Bible clearly says those who are adulterers do not go to heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21).

So, how do we get around what these verses say? Many have been those who have attempted to get around them, BUT IT CAN’T BE DONE! God’s Word is right and no man can get around it. Those who try are only fooling themselves and breaking themselves over the holy inspired Scriptures.

In Matthew chapter 19, Jesus was asked about marriage, divorce and remarriage. The text says Pharisees came unto Jesus “...tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause” (v.3)? These men were not honest in their inquiry about divorce. They did not want to know God’s will on the subject. They only wanted to trap Jesus in some inconsistency where they would have evidence to condemn him. Their motive being evil did not change the truth of the Lord’s answer. Jesus “...answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made [them] at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together; let not man put asunder” (vs.4-6).

Jesus goes back to the beginning of creation. It was God who made a man and a woman and the institution of marriage. God intended they cleave (cling, hold, stick) to each other. They become, as it were, one flesh. God joins them together and man has no right to separate them. But man often says he has a special circumstance of one sort or another and proceeds to divorce and marry again in spite of what the Lord said. However, the Lord’s word still says what it says,

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Man says, I’m going to do it anyway! God replies, “let not man put asunder.” First Corinthians 7:10-11 says the same thing, “Let not the wife depart from [her] husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to [her] husband: and let not the husband put away [his] wife.” A man or woman does not have the right to put away their spouse for just any and every excuse..

The Pharisees continue the conversation with Jesus in Matthew 19:7-9, “...Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except [it be] for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

Jesus says in verse 9, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except [it be] for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.” This is not hard to understand! It’s hard for many to accept, but it’s not hard to understand. To divorce your spouse and marry another means that both you and your new spouse are living in adultery. If, however, you put away your spouse because he/she has committed fornication, then you can marry another without living in adultery. The present tense of the word “committeth” involves “continuous action.” Those who have entered into such a marriage “keep on” committing adultery as long as they remain married. Both parties are living in the constant state of adultery. Some contend you can’t live in adultery, but Colossians 3:5-7 says you can.

The effect of the Lord’s words is that if one divorces their spouse and it is not because of their spouse’s fornication, then both must live single the rest of their life — neither have the right to enter into another marriage, if they do so, they are committing adultery.

You can see how serious a matter this is! The Lord’s disciples recognize it and say unto him, “...If the case of the man be so with [his] wife, it is not good to marry” (Matt. 19:10). They had no problem understanding what Jesus

said. Why do people today not see it? It's because they don't want to see it. They are looking for a loop-hole, a work-a-round, some way to circumvent it. Many may not like what Jesus said, but they can't deny what he said. They understand it clearly. That's why they rebel against it.

Jesus explains in verses 11-12 that in order to be faithful to God, for the kingdom of heaven's sake, some do not marry — cannot marry. They live single. They had rather go to heaven when they die than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Moses is a good example of this (Heb. 11:24-26).

Jesus said in Matthew 19:11-12, "...All [men] cannot receive this saying, save [they] to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from [their] mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive [it], let him receive [it]."

There are three categories of individuals who live single, celibate lives. In each case, the Lord speaks of those who either can not or do not marry. 1) Those who were born without the capacity of functioning sexually as a marriage partner. 2) Those who through a surgical procedure cannot function as a marriage partner. 3) Those who choose to not function as a marriage partner. Reason number three is the one that fits those who have an unscriptural divorce. Their divorce is unscriptural (not authorized by scripture) because they did not put away their spouse because of their fornication. As a consequence, they forgo marriage because they have no scriptural right to marry again. In order to be faithful to God, they must live single. Being right with God and going to heaven some day is vastly more important than any relationship or circumstance known to man.

It's a mystery why many fight so hard against Matthew 19:9. If it were not for what Jesus said in this verse about fornication (see also Matt. 5:32), no one could ever divorce and get married again period! Fornication is the only exception for a divorce and remarriage. Either "except" means "except" or it does not. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and

[of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Being "born of water and of the Spirit" is the ONLY way to enter into the kingdom of heaven. There is no other way. Jesus likewise said, "except for fornication" — there is no other way to divorce your spouse and marry another.

The Example of Ezra...

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man's duty to submit to and obey the Will of God. Those who obey God's Word will receive salvation and innumerable blessings (James 1:21; Matt. 7:24). However, fierce consequences await those who refuse to obey the Gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

HE SPREAD THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS

Ezra's fourth step was to spread the statutes of God as depicted by the phrase, "*and to teach in Israel the statutes and judgments.*" Ezra realized his responsibility to teach God's people. The Jews had been in captivity over seventy years. Many of these people were born in Babylon. They had lost sight of proper worship and service to God. The time had come for the new generation to be taught and the older generation to be reminded. The same responsibility rests upon God's people today. Jesus gave the "unlimited commission" to His apostles (Acts 1:8). The apostle Paul wrote that the Gospel "*was preached to every creature which is under heaven*" during his lifetime (Col. 1:23). However, the charge to preach the Gospel to every nation and every creature applies to every generation. Paul told Timothy, "*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*" (2 Tim. 2:2). So, despite the accomplishment of the apostles and church of the first century, the "unlimited commission" still applies to the twenty-first century church.

Please notice also that Ezra 7:10 records the actions of Ezra, not the people! Ezra prepared himself to serve the people and Jehovah. Although the attitude of the people while in Babylon was comprised of regret and grief, their disposition changed by the time Ezra entered

Jerusalem: "*Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yeah, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass*" (Ezra 9:1-2).

When Ezra heard these words (joined by others who feared the Lord, Ezra 9:4), he sat astonished. Ezra and his faithful followers expected great things in Jerusalem, but they arrived in the city only to find that the majority of people were behaving inappropriately. They were disappointed, bewildered and discouraged. Yet, in verses 10-15, Ezra confessed the sins of Judah to Jehovah. After he prayed for the people, the men, women and the children of Israel wept over their condition and repented, saying, "*Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my Lord, and of these that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it*" (Ezra 10:3-4).

Friend, you may be in sin right now, but you do not have to remain in sin. Why not determine to make things right with the Lord? Will you acknowledge the commandment of God to be saved and do it? If you've never named the name of the Lord, you must **believe in Jesus** (John 8:24), **repent of sins** (Acts 17:30), **confess faith in Jesus as the son of God** (Rom. 10:9-10), and be **baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins** (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Those who are unfaithful to Christ are told to **repent and pray** (Acts 8:22). If your sin is publicly known, you must repent publicly so the church will know your desire to be restored. Won't you obey God today and every day?

Elder's COLUMN

Many congregations of God's people publish a weekly bulletin. Some may wonder why a local church even bothers with such an item. After all, it requires time and work to prepare a bulletin. Bulletins do not produce themselves, so it takes effort on someone's part to get them done. And, the paper and ink used to print them are not cheap. Besides, if you have ever noticed, some of them just get thrown down on the floor. Maybe you have even seen that in some cases, kids turn bulletins into drawing paper or a coloring book. Oh yes, we are aware of all of these truths. Still, we are convinced that church bulletins have the potential to be a great aid in the Lord's work.

Church bulletins come in different sizes, colors and formats, but basically they all have one thing in common: church bulletins are used as a means of communication.

First, they are *a tool by which a local church teaches the Bible*. The teaching of the Bible via bulletins is one way of carrying out the Lord's charge to preach the Gospel to every person (Mark 16:15). At the same time, the teaching done in bulletin articles and other Bible-based materials is a means of edifying or building up the church (Rom. 14:19).

A second major function of bulletins is *to provide information to the congregation*. If we are to see to the needs of the sick or those with special material or physical needs (Matt. 25:35,36), then we need to be aware of those needs and opportunities. Providing such information in bulletins is helpful in getting the word out to all the members of a congregation. Announcements relative to upcoming events of a local church are often printed in bulletins. This helps the members arrange their plans in order to be able to support the activities of the church. We also know that we are to rejoice with those that

CHURCH BULLETINS

Roger D. Campbell

When we publish in our bulletins every announcement "under the sun" that comes our way, we are sending a message to our brethren that can potentially damage their souls

rejoice and weep with those that weep (Rom. 12:15). We show support for those members of the body that suffer as well as those that are honored (1 Cor. 12:26). Printing information about these matters helps keep a congregation better informed and prepared to serve others in the body.

From "the Great Commission" and other New Testament passages, we conclude that a local church is authorized to prepare, produce, print, and pass out a church bulletin. The leaders of a local church give consideration to what type of bulletin arrangement is most expedient for a local flock of God's people. Those leaders then determine the size, format and frequency of producing a bulletin for the needs of a local congregation. Bulletins really can be edifying, encouraging and useful in a number of senses.

Church bulletins can also be quite revealing. What do church bulletins reveal?

For one thing, many church bulletins reveal attendance tendencies. I am appalled at some of the attendance statistics that I see in the bulletins of congregations that have had a reputation of being sound in the faith. It is not uncommon for some of them to have an average Sunday morning Bible class attendance or mid-week attendance that is barely 50% of the average Sunday morning worship attendance. In many cases there are special health and other issues that affect a congregation's attendance, but 50%?! We all need to take seriously the charge to seek first the Lord's affairs (Matt. 6:33) and set our interests on spiritual matters (Col. 3:2). When God and His affairs have first place in our hearts, our attendance at the services of God's church will be a natural thing for us.

Church bulletins reveal a church's emphasis. What dominates the pages of a bulletin, is it social matters or spiritual matters? What is

predominantly seen in a bulletin's "teaching section," is it quotes from the Bible, or quotes from "religious scholars" of our day? Is it humor or Bible? There is a place for God's people to smile, as the Bible says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine" (Prov. 17:22). I have neither the desire nor the right to try and tell a preacher or bulletin-preparer what percentage of his message may be humor-oriented. But, brethren, mark it down. A strong church is not built and maintained by humor! God's Kingdom is strengthened through strong teaching of sound doctrine. After the apostle Paul expressed his concern for the future affairs of the church in Ephesus, he told the overseers from that city, "*And now, brethren, 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). Remember, we grow through the milk of God's word (1 Peter 2:2), not funny stories.

I mentioned one time to a brother in the Lord the name of a man that was scheduled to appear on a youth program. The brother told me that he had heard the man speak before. His analysis was that the man in his sermon used three or four verses and filled the rest of his time with humor and stories. Brethren, where is the emphasis in our teaching from the pulpits, in the classroom, and in our bulletins? Is the emphasis on the Book, or social affairs? Is it on the Lord's word, or men's stories? God being my helper, as long as my feeble hands have a part in producing a bulletin, it will be a teaching tool that is Bible-oriented.

Some church bulletins reveal the flesh. I take no delight in saying such, but it is true. Some bulletins I have seen show women with bare mid-sections, men and women wearing swimsuits, or both sexes wearing

skimpy jogging shorts that cover only about 1/3 of the upper leg. Surely there would never be such flesh on display in church bulletins? Sadly, it happens. “You must be talking about denominations and not the church of Christ.” No, I am talking 100% about bulletins put out by brethren in the Lord’s church.

The covering of the body from shoulders to knees that God apparently provided for Adam and Eve when He clothed them in tunics (Gen. 3:21), is still a safe practice to follow in our dress. “Modest apparel” is still in fashion with the Lord God (1 Tim. 2:9). That goes for pictures in church bulletins just as much as it does for any other occasion. Some congregations now publish their bulletins on-line (web-sites on the internet). Some web sites include pictures of activities that involve members of the congregation. Some of these on-line photos reveal the flesh just like some printed bulletins do. Again, I take no pleasure in pointing out the reality of what some congregations do and then publish in picture form in their bulletins or on the internet. I am simply pointing out the facts.

Church bulletins also reveal the fellowship tendencies of a congregation. When we announce upcoming events, activities and programs that involve other congregations and special speakers, should we not take care to announce only those that involve sound brethren? Surely some items fall into the realm of judgment. Yet, it is a mystery to me why some congregations seem to make little or no distinction in the things they advertise and encourage the local saints to support. When a bulletin announces a gospel meeting at a sound congregation, then right alongside it there is an announcement about a drama team from an apostate university in Nashville, TN (David Lipscomb University) coming somewhere to perform for the area teens! This is sending forth a mixed signal of uncertain sounds. Either folks do not know what is going on, they do not see error as a big deal, they just do not care, or else they are deceived into thinking that as long as an announcement says “church of Christ” on it, “then surely it can’t be too bad.” Brethren, we are not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). When we

publish in our bulletins every announcement “under the sun” that comes our way, we are sending a message to our brethren that can potentially damage their souls. When we support the unfaithful, we become partakers of their evil deeds. The Bible says so (2 John 9-11).

Church bulletins can be extremely helpful to the Lord’s Cause. I personally benefit from a number of bulletins that I receive. I thank God for them. Other bulletins I have seen through the years have been, to say it kindly, woefully lacking when it comes to providing any true spiritual benefit. May every congregation of the Lord’s church that produces a bulletin be committed to using it for God’s glory, for the strengthening of His church, and for the eternal salvation of souls.

120 Will Lewis Dr. SE
Cleveland, TN 37323

CONTRIBUTIONS

Dan Huffines	\$25
Jean Ware (memory of Joe Ware).....	\$40
Baker C/C, Baker, FL.....	\$25
Anonymous	\$100
M. Butler.....	\$15
James Berry.....	\$30
T. Medlin	\$25
Berea C/C, McMinnville, TN	\$100
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WANTED: PREACHERS LIKE THE PROPHETS

Today, men cannot be prophets in the same sense as in the Bible. But we need the same caliber of spokesmen today as these men were. Notice some of the qualities of these men.

1) They were men of deep conviction. They were convinced of their message and the need for people to respond to it (Jer. 4:19).

2) They did not “beat around the bush” in getting the message across. Nathan, in confronting David with sin, said, “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7).

3) They did not fear the reaction of men. Elijah denounced King Ahab’s sin (1 Kings 21:20).

4) They did not go along with the crowd. Read about Micaiah who stood against 400 false prophets (1 Kings 22).

5) They were willing to suffer and die for God’s cause (Heb. 11:37).

6) They had grief and pity (Jer. 8:18).

7) They proclaimed judgment. For most of the prophets, this was a recurring theme (Micah 3:12). Judgment must be preached today (Acts 17:30,31).

8) They rebuked false prophets and leaders (Micah 3:11).

9) They spoke out on morality and ethics. Amos said, “Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink...” (Amos 5:11).

10) They became discouraged, but not defeated. Jeremiah did not quit! He said, “If I say I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain” (Jer. 20:9).

Are you a preacher like the prophets? We must be careful of “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10).

— Author Unknown

WHY KNOW THE BIBLE?

Frank J. Dunn

After 55 years of studying and preaching the word of God, the author gives the following reasons why we should all seek to know the Bible. Why must you know your Bible?

1) *Know Your Bible in order to have everlasting life.* In praying to the Father, Jesus said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). The Bible is the only source of perfect, saving knowledge of God and Christ.

2) *Know Your Bible to know the greatest book ever written.* The Bible is the best book because God is its author. There were forty penmen, but only one author. All of the writers were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). No other book can compare with the Bible. It is truly God's book!

3) *Know Your Bible so that you will know who you are.* Only from the Bible can you know your origin, mission, and destiny — where you came from, why you are here, and where you are going. We are not a product of evolution. We are a product of divine creation. God made man in His image, and man became a morally responsible, living soul (Gen. 1:26,26; 2:7). Our mission is to glorify God and become as God-like as possible in preparation for the judgment and our personal accountability to God (Rom. 14:11,12).

4) *Know Your Bible to be saved from sin.* The Bible is the only book that has as its main message the salvation of sinners. The Bible alone answers the world's greatest question, "What must I do to be saved?" "The Father sent to the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). He saves sinners by His Gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Therefore, Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15,16).

5) *Know Your Bible in order to identify the church of the Lord and know its importance.* When one obeys

the Gospel by being baptized into Christ, he is born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5), into the family of God. This is the spiritual body of Christ, the church of which He is the head (Eph. 1:22,23). Christ has only one body (Eph. 4:4), one church (Acts 2:47). In the New Testament, members of the Lord's church were Christians only (Acts 11:26); and, they were the only Christians.

6) *Know Your Bible to find the Christian way of life, worship and service.* The inspired Scriptures are the only doctrine of the New Testament church. The Scriptures alone furnish us completely unto all good works (2

Tim. 3:16,17). The inspired word teaches us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

7) *Know Your Bible in order to reach the highest goal, "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:14). Paul counted all things "but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). We should strive to be like Paul, who near the time of his departure from this life could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7,8).

SOME DANGEROUS NATIONS AMONG US

Darrell Beard

In the history of the world, there have been nations which posed a great danger to people who lived around them. In ancient times, the Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Romans, and others were very dangerous nations. In more recent history, Germany, Japan, Russia, and China have been counted as dangerous nations. However, the most dangerous "nations" are not earthly powers. There are other forces of which we must be aware and against which we must guard.

There are some things the Bible states are abominations in the sight of God. These things pervert and destroy man spiritually. In Deuteronomy 18:9-12, Moses pointed out that idolatry and practices of the occult were *abominations* to the Lord. Solomon said that seven things are an abomination to God: "A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness [that] speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19). Truly, these are dangerous "nations."

1) Many Christians are eternally

ruined by *contamination*. They fall prey to practices of the world — immorality, drinking, dancing, cursing, gambling, etc. How tragic that this powerful "nation" has kept them from remaining "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

2) *Discrimination* is a great danger to the peace and well-being of the world. It has even invaded the church, giving many an ungodly, non-Christian attitude. We understand that all are made in the image of God, and that "in Christ" we are of equal importance and value to the Lord. Why, then, do some in the church practice worldly discrimination between the rich and poor, the young and the old, male and female, black and white, etc.?

3) Some are defeated by *termination*. It may be that one becomes upset with something in the local church. Family problems may arise, a difficulty is experienced between brethren, someone's feelings get hurt, etc. What happens? They terminate — they give up church responsibilities, stop contributing, quit attending. The end result is that they have become entangled and overcome in the defilements of the world by their termination (2

Peter 2:20-22).

4) As innocent as it looks, *procrastination* is one of the most dangerous nations of all! One may convince himself that he means well and will do better some day when all the time he is completely conquered and dominated by this “nation.”

5) *Denominations* are very danger-

ous because, while appearing quite beneficial and good, they are responsible for dividing believers in Christ into separate, competing groups. Christ came to unite all in one body, the undenominational church of Christ. Paul taught against this “nation” when he said, “I beseech you, brethren...that there be no divisions among you; but

that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

6) The ultimate danger to our souls is eternal *condemnation!* One day all will stand before God in judgment to receive eternal victory over our dangerous nations, or to be destroyed by them.

THAT'S JUST YOUR INTERPRETATION

John D. Cotham

When people use this statement they nearly always mean: “That’s the way you look at a passage, but I think it means this or that. So, who’s to say you’re right and I’m wrong?” One problem is that so many listen to so-called scholars. It is true that there are many men with high credentials who are preaching this or that. What is a person to do? Do we throw up our hands and argue that no one can really know the true interpretation of a passage of scripture? This is what the false teacher would like for us to do. This outlook on the Word of God allows them to teach virtually anything they want without much argument from others.

Is interpretation of God’s word left to just any interpretation that you or I might give it? What one must do is let the Word of God answer all the questions.

God would be unjust if He demanded our obedience while at the same time He knew that man could not understand His instructions. God intended that not just the scholarly man, but also the unlearned man should understand His word. This means that for every instruction of God, there is but one meaning intended by God. I might not fully understand it, nor might you, but it still has its one meaning, not many. There is only one right interpretation to any given passage. It is up to us to dig it out and to stick to that correct interpretation.

It IS possible to know all the essential things the Scriptures teach. Jesus said: “*If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31-32). Paul said we are to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Peter said: “*If any man speak, let him speak as the*

oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). Paul told the Corinthians to “*speak the same thing...be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment*” (1 Cor. 1:10).

The holy scriptures provides ALL the instruction needed by man. “*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, throughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter also said: “*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 1:3). God said through Isaiah that He could reason with man, “*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD...*” (Isa. 1:18).

Every one of these verses indicate not only that God intended for man to know His word, but also that God could reason with man, allowing men to come to the same understanding (same mind, same judgment). How could it be otherwise if one is to be saved through God’s word? “*And now, brethren, 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). “*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*” (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

The interpretation of every man depends upon his personal approach to the Word of God. Whether one has respect for God is shown by his honest effort to find God’s meaning in every passage he studies. Everyone must

approach the Word of God with the same attitude of the Bereans: “...they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). For one to go to the scriptures to prove what he wants it to say is to be dishonest with the scriptures and will not bring about an honest interpretation.

It might very well be that you understand a scripture and I don’t. Or, I could understand it, and you might not. It could be that neither of us understand it. However, if we both understand it, we both will have come to the same understanding (interpretation) just as Paul instructed in 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is not a matter of MY interpretation or YOUR interpretation, but the RIGHT interpretation. It is always the matter of coming to the same understanding as meant by God. If someone approaches the Word of God rationally, with diligent study, good reasoning will allow man to come to an understanding of the truth.

There will always be those who are ignorant of the Word of God. Sad to say, many are ignorant by choice. Paul spoke of those who are “*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 3:7). It is God’s desire that men KNOW the truth, “*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*” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

Please take God’s word at its face value. To obey it will lead you to salvation, “...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

23466 Highway 49
Saucier, MS 39574



SEEK THE OLD PATHS

“Thank you so very much. May God bless each and every one. Thank you for writing the truth” ...**name withheld by request.** “James Thompson has passed away” ...**Bullard, TX.** “Brother Robinson, thanks for sending me *Seek The Old Paths* paper and for always contending for the truth that was once delivered to the saints” ...**Dale Stovall, Imboden, AR.** “Would you please start sending me your publication” ...**Bettye Lane, Beebe, AR.** “Thank you for sending STOP to me for the last several years. I would like to be removed from the mailing list. Thanks again” ...**Name withheld by request.** “Brother Robinson, thank you for sending your wonderful Gospel paper to me for many years. Please add this name to your mailing list. He would like to receive a copy. Thank you” ...**Wayne Crum, Caledonia, OH.** “Upon arrival of this note with a small offering to help with the Lord’s work there, I pray all is well with everyone there. Thank you for continuing sending me the publication of *Seek The Old Paths*” ...**Leadale Simpson, Rockford, IL.** “Thank you so much for being willing and not afraid to stand up for the truth. The only words to describe how my wife and I feel are ‘thrilling and looking forward to heaven.’ Thank you so much!” ...**Name withheld by request, OH.** “Please send your paper, *Seek The Old Paths*, to... Keep up the good work. God bless you all” ...**Teddy Medlen, Jonesville, MI.** “Please note our change of address” ...**Ed & Bea Stelmach, Wheeling, WV.** “You have been sending STOP to my husband, but I need to cancel the paper. Wesley Wall died 4/11. I will be moving soon. Wes was a member of the church of Christ for many years. Thank you and God bless you” ...**Dixie Wall, Madison, MS.** “Josie J. Smith has passed away” ...**Mocksville, NC.** “Please take us off your mailing list. Please do not print our names. Thank you” ...**Jonesboro, GA.** “Please send me one copy each of Jan. & Feb. 2012. Pray for us and we will do the same” ...**James W. Berry, Montgomery, AL.** “Return to sender. Refused” ...**Troy & Martha Meeks, Corinth, MS.** “Lucy Stansberry passed away” ...**Elk City, OK.** “Once again, I certainly look forward to STOP. Use the \$\$ to help wherever. Best of luck in your new work and location” ...**Dan Huffines, Gainesboro, TN.** “Please put me on the mailing list to receive *Seek The Old Paths*. A friend of mine let me read the last issue you put out. I simply must be on the mailing list also. Keep up the fine work you are doing for the Lord” ...**Bobby Bennett, Martin, TN.** “While visiting a Gospel meeting, I picked up a copy of STOP. I would love to receive future copies if that can be arranged. Thank you for this good work. I wish for you the very best of life’s blessings” ...**L. C. Bingham, Wayne, OK.** “Dear brother Robinson, the Pleasant View Church of Christ sends greetings to you. We know the STOP is a good work that you are undertaking. Enclosed is a check to support this work. We are confident that the Gospel is being taught and that our financial support will be put to good use. May God bless you and your family as well as the work at East End” ...**Pleasant View Church of Christ, Woodbury, TN.** “This is to inform you of a change in my address so that I can continue to receive STOP, a huge blessing in my life. Also, I saw in the March 2012 STOP where Garland Robinson was going to the Leoni Church of Christ. Could you be sure my address is changed so that there will be no interruption in the STOP publication at its new address? Thank you” ...**Claude Mazza, Chatham, VA.**

THE BARE BONE FACTS

“When an engineer builds a building, a bridge or some other structure, he must build it so that it

can withstand both stretching and compressing forces. In designing the structure to withstand both kinds of these forces, he must anticipate how much of each force the structure might face in its lifetime. Some materials, like cast iron and concrete, are very good at withstanding compression forces but very poor in handling stretching forces. Using one of these materials to build a structure that undergoes tensile or stretching forces could lead to disaster.

Now let’s apply our basic engineering information to the problem of building a frame or skeleton for a living creature. Although you may weigh only 130 pounds, your long leg bone will very likely have to be prepared to deal with more than 1,000 pounds of compression and hundreds of pounds of tension from the muscles that are anchored to it.

It’s a good thing, then, that normal bone is three times as strong as good solid wood and nearly as strong as iron! Tests have shown that the tensile strength of bone is 35,000 pounds per square inch, while iron is 40,000 pounds per square inch. But bone material is better than iron because it is three times lighter and much more flexible.

The structure of your bones is too carefully engineered to have been an accident. If life were the result of impersonal evolution, evolution would still be trying to engineer the best material for skeletons, and there would be an awful lot of jellyfish around! — *Creation Moments*.

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Editor: **Garland M. Robinson** – seektheoldpaths.com

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PO BOX 7506
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