

# 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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## BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS

*Stephen Wiggins*

The first recorded sermon Jesus preached is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. Within, the Savior made the following statement, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves"* (Matt. 7:15). The Master warned his followers to exercise perception with regard to false teachers in view of their insidious nature and the disastrous influence which they exert in the spiritual realm.

The same warning must be heeded today by God's people. With the current proliferation of religious error disseminated throughout the land, multiplied millions are misled as it pertains to the truth of God.

What follows is an exegetical analysis of the passage just quoted. Hopefully, knowledge of what our Lord articulates will heighten our appreciation for the great privilege and responsibility we have in detecting and exposing those who bring about the spiritual detriment of others through their religious error.

### BEWARE

The full force of this opening term is not entirely unpacked by translation. One does not get the initial impression from the English text that Jesus is relating a command which demands persistent and continuous action. Yet, this is exactly what he conveys. The term "beware" translates a word in the *imperative* mood. By far the most common means of relating a command in the

New Testament is with an imperative form (Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 221). When the Savior instructs us to be aware of pseudo religious teachers, he is not making a mere suggestion. No option is here given of which one has the convenience of choosing an alternate course; at least not if one is intent on living in obedience to the Master. A command within the biblical context always sets forth a duty of which one is obligated to obey. No divine mandate should ever be taken lightly nor ignored. This one is no exception.

The *present* tense of the imperative relates an ongoing activity which is not discharged with a one-time or irregular effort. Greek tense in non-indicative moods does not primarily convey *time* (this is secondary if present at all) but rather *aspect* or how the verbal action unfolds. The kind of action often conveyed by the present tense is continuous or habitual activity. It is the progressive notion of an event. That is what is related here by the use of the present imperative. Technically, it may be identified as the "customary" present that signals an action which customarily or regularly occurs (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Exegetical Syntax*, 521). The significance here is that Jesus commands the disciples to be on constant, habitual alert as it pertains to their exercising discernment in detecting false teachers. It is obeyed only by persistent effort on our part.

Lexical sources define the term

translated "beware" as to turn one's mind to, to fix one's attention upon, to give heed (Rogers/Rogers, 16). In this context it carries the idea of being on guard, on alert, and attentive to potential dangers which lurk in the form of spiritual predators. Jesus uses the term ten times during his preaching, always in the sense of putting his disciples on alert for some aberrant religious practice or doctrine which has the capacity to bring about one's spiritual demise. For example, he later employs the term with the same imperative form when cautioning the apostles to be *on guard* against the leaven of the Jewish leaders, i.e., their errant doctrines (Matt. 16:6,12).

### PSEUDO PROPHETS

The phrase "false prophets" translates only one term in the original, albeit a compound term. The word "false" renders the prefix *pseudo* which relates the concept of bogus or counterfeit. A *pseudo* prophet is a pretender, one who falsely claims to speak for God. Peter attaches the same prefix to the terms "prophet" and "teacher" demonstrating that the "pseudo prophet" and the "pseudo teacher" are synonymous (2 Peter 2:1). One source defines this latter term as a *quack teacher*, that is, "someone in the Christian community who pretends to be a qualified instructor, but whose teaching is con-

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**False Prophets...**



Editorial...

## THE DARKNESS AND THE LIGHT ARE BOTH ALIKE #1

Garland M. Robinson

God the Father, Jehovah, Yahweh, Deity, is in heaven above. As a matter of fact, He is everywhere. He is not limited to a specific location. God, more specifically the WORD (cf. John 1:1-3; Col. 1:13-18), is the one that made all “places” that exist. That is, He is the creator of physical (material) matter and the space it occupies. Since He is the originator and sustainer, the one who balances and keeps “in check” the material universe by upholding it with the word of His power (cf. Heb. 1:3), He is not bound or limited by that which He created. He is the one that caused it to exist!

The nature of God is an important topic. There are three distinct characteristics that deity possesses:

1) God is **Omnipotent**. He is ALL POWERFUL. Nothing is too great for Him. Nothing can overpower Him. He is not bound nor limited in His power. Nothing is more powerful than He.

2) God is **Omnipresent**. He is EVERYWHERE. No place exists that He is not there. There’s no place that man can hide from God.

3) God is **Omniscient**. He is ALL KNOWING. Nothing escapes His notice or knowledge. He sees all and observes all.

It is this third characteristic about which our lesson is concerned. The Bible is filled with passages informing us of God’s omniscience. He sees our actions — literally everything we do. He is well aware of our affairs. The text for this lesson declares it sufficiently. Psalms 139:1-12,

<sup>1</sup>O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known [me]. <sup>2</sup>Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. <sup>3</sup>Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted [with] all my

ways. <sup>4</sup>For [there is] not a word in my tongue, [but], lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. <sup>5</sup>Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. <sup>6</sup>[Such] knowledge [is] too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot [attain] unto it. <sup>7</sup>Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? <sup>8</sup>If I ascend up into heaven, thou [art] there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou [art] there. <sup>9</sup>[If] I take the wings of the morning, [and] dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; <sup>10</sup>Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. <sup>11</sup>If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. <sup>12</sup>Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: *the darkness and the light [are] both alike [to thee].*

The 139th Psalm is a great high-light and bastion of truth. It will humble every soul that reads and/or hears its lines and in turn gives thoughtful consideration to it. All pale and sink into utter oblivion when they ponder its sublime contents.

We need light in order to see. Without it, there is no sight. Without the sun reflecting its light off the moon, we would not behold its beauty and amazement. Beauty and/or ugliness may be right in front of us, but without light we cannot recognize either. Standing before us may be something that would bring great joy or perhaps something that would cause great fear, but in the absence of light we cannot see it.

God does not need light to see. He has no trouble seeing in utter darkness. He is not limited or bound

by the absence of light. Verse 12 of Psalm 139 makes it plain that with God, “...*the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike...*” unto Him.

### CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD

Almost without exception, men seek the cover of darkness to work their evil deeds. Jesus said, “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (John 3:19). There are even some who are so arrogant and brazen in their wickedness that they do not wait for the cover of darkness. They do their despicable deed in broad day light. Shame unto them and all that love their ways!

Sinful men do not want the light — the truth of God. They don’t want to be discovered and brought to justice. They love evil. “*Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*” (Job 21:14). “*They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof*” (Job 24:13). “*They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course*” (Psalm 82:5).

The wise man Solomon speaks of men “*who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness*” (Prov. 2:13). “*And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof*” (Prov. 5:12).

Sin entered into the world very early in man’s existence. One of the first things Adam and Eve did after eating the forbidden fruit was to hide themselves from God. Genesis 3:8 says, “*...they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.*” They found out that you cannot hide from Jehovah. Literally everything is in plain view in His sight. This great principle is stated in Numbers 32:23, “*...be sure your sin will find you out.*”

Achan tried to hide his evil act of taking spoils out of Jericho. His deed was discovered after Israel’s 3,000 men fled from the battle of Ai which was defended by only a few men (Josh. 7:4). Achan sought to justify

his actions saying, *“When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they [are] hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it”* (Josh. 7:21). He could have buried these vanities deeper than man can dig, but they would not be hidden from God’s sight. God knew what he had done and exposed him for it.

*Potiphar’s wife* thought she could hide her wicked plans of adultery with Joseph. She begged him day after day, but he refused. She made it so that on one occasion when Joseph came to the house to do his business that none of the men were there. She and Joseph were all alone. She took hold of him and would have had her way with him but he ran away leaving his garment in her hands. Genesis 39:9 says he had told her, *“...how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.”* She thought no one would know, it was just the two of them, but Joseph knew that God would know. Nothing is hidden from His sight! Adultery is a great sin against God. It cannot be hidden.

*David* tried desperately to hide his adultery with Bathsheba by calling her husband home from battle. But when *Uriah* did not cooperate with David’s plan, David had him put in the forefront of the battle and he was killed. Thinking no one would be the wiser concerning what he had done, David took Bathsheba to be his wife (2 Sam. 11). The Lord revealed David’s deed to *Nathan* the prophet and David was caught. Be sure your sin will find you out. If not in this life, it certainly will in the life to come.

The wickedness of far-off *Nineveh*, a Gentile city, was readily known by God. Jonah was dispatched to preach to them of their impending doom. Jonah did not want the city to hear the word of the Lord. He was afraid they would repent and God would spare them, which is what they did (cf. Jon. 3:10-4:2). He tried to escape the command of God so he *“...rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD”* (Jon. 1:3;

Tarshish was in the opposite direction of Nineveh). Though he sought to hide himself in the deepest recesses of the ship, Jonah’s presence was fully known to Jehovah. A great storm arose on the sea, the mariners sought desperately to save themselves, but ultimately threw Jonah overboard. Jonah sank down into the depths of the sea but God knew where he was. He was not hidden. There is no indication the shipmen ever saw Jonah again once they cast him out. He perished out of their sight, but not out of the sight of God. The great fish God had prepared swallowed Jonah and God kept him alive. The omniscience of God is proved beyond question by this historical account of Jonah.

*Ananias*, along with his wife *Sapphira*, sold a piece of property and lied about their giving. They thought no one would be the wiser. They coveted the honor and praise they would receive when others learned of their generous gift. But God knew what they both had conspired to do and then went before the apostles and carried out their devious plan. They paid for their wicked deed with their very lives that same day. Their souls even now have regretted a countless number of times over that they could go back and undo their deed. But, it’s too late!

How foolish men are when they seek to hide their deeds from the Lord. In Jeremiah 23:24 we read, *“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD?”* Another clear proof of God’s all-seeing eye is Amos 9:3: *“And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them.”*

Isaiah 29:15 says, *“Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?”* Job said, *“[There is] no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves”* (34:22). *“For mine eyes [are] upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes”* (Jer. 16:17).

God sees. God knows. God keeps count. God remembers. God rewards. *“He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what [is] in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him”* (Dan. 2:22). *“...The thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light”* (Job 28:11). *“O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee”* (Psalm 69:5). *“My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, [and] curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth”* (Psalm 139:15). *“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God”* (Isa. 40:27)? *“For mine eyes [are] upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes”* (Jer. 16:17).

Are YOU trying to hide from God? It can’t be done!

## How Do We Hear?

We are warned in Scripture to take heed *what* we hear (Mark 4:24) and *how* we hear (Luke 8:18). We may not always be able to control everything that might fall on our ears, but much of it we can. And, whatever we do hear we can take care how we hear, that is, what effect it might have on us. We can use self-control and self-discipline regarding our reactions to such things. But do we hear any better than the next fellow? What I am asking is whether we pay any attention to what we hear more than others even when we hear the Gospel truth of Jesus Christ? Do we respond any more favorable before God than those who reject His Word altogether?

Yes, most would say they hear better when it comes to hearing God’s Word. We often criticize those in religious error for just not paying real attention to the revealed truth. This criticism is justly given. But when I hear the command to “assemble faithfully” being taught, and see brothers and sisters act as if such a command was never given, it does make one wonder how we hear.

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## False Prophets...

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trary to the generally accepted tradition” (BDAG, 1096). Paul prefixes the same term to “apostle” to identify the *pseudo* apostles who feign themselves as apostles of Christ but really are deceitful pawns under the influence of Satan (2 Cor. 11:13; cf. Rev. 2:2). In yet another place he reminds us that there is such a thing as *pseudo* brethren who seek to corrupt the purity of the Gospel (Gal. 2:4-5).

The Septuagint [earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (250 B.C.)] exerted wide influence with first century Jews. Its terminology would have been familiar with those of Jesus’ audience, including the concept of a *pseudo-prophet*. The term occurs ten times in that version, once by Zechariah and every other time in Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah it is the pseudo-prophet who produces lies (6:13); and, along with the priests, pronounced a sentence of death upon him because of his proclamation of the truth (33:6-16); they repudiated the words of the inspired prophet and denied that Babylonian captivity was imminent (34:9; 35:1); further, it was God who pled with the people through Jeremiah not to be misled by the false words of the pseudo-prophets (36:1,8). Finally, the Lord anticipated the day when all pseudo-prophets would be banished from the land (Zech. 13:2). When Jesus used this exact same term in his preaching, it is not without reason to suppose that those in his audience called to mind these events from the prophetic books.

Jesus employs the word *pseudo-prophets* a total of five times in the Gospel accounts. A key term which occurs within these contexts is the word “many.” His reference to the “many pseudo-prophets” who “shall arise and lead many astray” (Matt. 24:11) anticipates the situation later during the first century — “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many pseudo-prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The many pseudo-prophets from these two passages, in turn, anticipates the many who, after finding themselves barred from the heavenly kingdom, are portrayed as arguing

with the Lord on the judgment day: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name...” (Matt. 7:22). The pseudo-prophets Jesus warns of in Matthew 7:15 are the many counterfeits who claimed to prophesy for the Lord yet are denied access into heaven. Contextually, it is these many false prophets who helped guide the many down the broad and wide way leading to eternal destruction just two verses earlier (7:13-14). The point seems clear: those few (the minority of the human race) intent on following the strait and narrow way which leads to heaven must be on the alert for those many bogus prophets pretending to speak for God as they are leading the many (the majority of the human race) straight to hell.

### WHO COME TO YOU

Way too many commentators are preoccupied with identifying specifically who Jesus has in mind when he references the pseudo-prophets. But this absorption with identity is to obscure the very principle our Lord makes. First, contextually, the false prophets are not identified as to specifically who they are or what they teach. Second, grammatically, the “who” is a relative pronoun which is indefinite. It simply conveys the thought that *whoever* or *everyone* who comes to you as an imposter is included. The generic pronoun references any unspecified person belonging to the class of false teachers. The use here emphasizes a characteristic quality rather than identify a particular person or persons (BDAG, 729). The point is that anyone who comes to the disciples pretending to speak the truth of God, but in fact does not, is to be identified as a pseudo-prophet. In short, it makes no difference who it may be or what generation of humanity they are teaching, whether it takes place in the first century or the twenty-first century. Nor does it matter as to their brand of error. If their doctrine is not in compliance with the revelation of God’s inspired word, then it is false and those who propagate that error are false teachers. Keep in mind that a false doctrine, within the context of which I here speak, is nothing more or less than a religious message which the Bible does not substanti-

ate or authorize. All religious teaching is to be examined and approved in light of God’s word.

With a verb in the present tense followed by a preposition which has directional force, it is significant that Jesus describes these pseudo-prophets as “coming toward” the disciples (Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 172). The picture is that of false teachers advancing forward as they approach God’s people with ulterior motives. The apostle John uses the same verb coupled with the same preposition in view of the false teachers who refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ seeking out and advancing toward the saints (“If anyone comes unto you...,” 2 John 10). Paul employs a future tense of the same verb in anticipation of grievous wolves that he says “shall enter in among you” (Acts 20:29). False teachers always gravitate toward the faithful. It is their nature to do so.

The lesson to be appreciated is this: False teachers do not have to be sought out. They do not have to be trained, cultivated, or encouraged to accomplish their dastardly deeds. They are just here like they always have been and always will be this side of eternity; and they conveniently make themselves available wherever God’s people reside. This is the essence of false teachers. Their directional and aggressive mode of operation must be underscored. Jesus says they will “arise” so as to lead astray, if possible, the very elect of God (Matt. 24:24). Many of them have “gone forth” into the world (1 John 4:1) where they infiltrate the ranks of faithful brethren to “privily bring in destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). Has one ever wondered why theological liberals like Rubel Shelly rarely ever leave the churches of Christ for some other religious fellowship where their doctrinal aberrations would more likely be embraced? Answer: because it is not in their nature to do so. Pseudo-prophets always gravitate toward and seek to remain among the faithful to disseminate their error, not away from them.

### SHEEP’S CLOTHING

The pseudo-prophet advances toward God’s people “in clothing of

sheep.” One’s understanding of the false prophet’s disguise must take into consideration that sheep is a prominent metaphor in both Old and New Testaments for God’s people (Psa. 78:52; 100:3; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). The figure Jesus utilizes here is intended to underscore the deceptive nature of the false prophet. A draped over sheepskin covers his true identity. He looks like a sheep. He smells like a sheep. He acts like a sheep. He may periodically sound like a sheep. He wants everyone to think he is a pious sheep and a part of the flock just like everybody else.

Externally, he gives every appearance of promoting authentic Christianity in both word and deed. False teachers may and often do have pleasant and pleasing personalities. He may be educated, articulate, and even handsome. He may exhibit a benevolent or outward show of concern for the physical welfare of others. But God teaches us not to be surprised over the fact that deceitful preachers will cunningly portray themselves as righteous men: *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works”* (2 Cor. 11:13-15, ASV).

The point is that the false teacher appears harmless and guileless like the rest of God’s faithful saints. They appear as sincere and genuine Christians but hide their true intentions under a cloak of spirituality. They masquerade as something they are really not. Without this deceptive ploy, their mode of operation cannot be successful. They will *never* announce to the congregation that they are false teachers. They will *never* purposely make known their true intentions to the brotherhood. This is what makes them all the more dangerous. Superficially, they look and act like a devoted member of the Lord’s church. They portray themselves as genuine Christians. What Jesus wants us to know is that preachers cannot always be taken at face value, especially since they claim to speak for God. Discrimination must

be employed. Our salvation depends on it.

**RAVENING WOLVES**

The wolf is a natural predator of sheep. Thus, how fitting within the biblical context for false teachers to be portrayed under the metaphor of wolves (Ezek. 22:27-28; Zeph. 3:3-4; Acts 20:29). As a wolf is a mortal enemy of sheep, so it is the false teacher must be considered as a mortal enemy to the spiritual welfare of God’s people. Jesus depicts false teachers as “ravening” wolves. The term refers to that which is *destructively vicious* (Louw/Nida, 229). The fact that the false prophet is “inwardly” so is to underscore once again the outward, deceptive appearance of what everyone perceives as a pious preacher. This latter term is an adverb of place and here refers to the inner part of a person as the source of his thoughts and behavior (Louw/Nida, 321). Jesus uses the term again in describing the corrupt religious leaders of his day who “outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:28).

This is just like false prophets. They *outwardly* appear one way but *inwardly* are completely different than what people normally perceive. And yet it is possible to detect these pseudo prophets and expose their hypocrisy. This disclosure is not, however, by some magical insight into their minds or inner nature but — “By their fruits you shall know them” (v.16). Their teaching must be evaluated in light of God’s word. This is why the Master so plainly set forth the warning for God’s people to be on constant guard for such deceptive tactics of men. To fail in this regard is to our own spiritual detriment.

My paraphrastic translation of Matthew 7:15, which is intended to purposefully reflect the verbal tenses and nuances of my grammatical analysis, is as follows: *I command you to be constantly on alert for counterfeit prophets who advance toward you pretending on the outside to look like harmless sheep but in reality on the inside they are like destructive and predatory wolves who seek to devour the flock of God’s people.*

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## Elder's COLUMN

# LET US SHOW RESPECT FOR GOD IN OUR WORSHIP ASSEMBLIES

Roger D. Campbell

Following the death of Abihu and Nadab, two sons of Aaron who were killed for offering fire which the Lord had not commanded them, God said, *"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified..."* (Lev. 10:1-3). That whole scenario convinces me that worshipping the God of heaven is a serious activity that requires each worshipper to be holy and prepared to glorify Him properly. Do you not agree? Surely no child of God doubts the fact that He is worthy to be praised. The throne-scene in Revelation 4 shows elders praising God Almighty with these words: *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created"* (4:11).

In the Book of Psalms, we also read, *"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker"* (Psalm 95:6).

In this article, we want to offer some practical observations and reminders about our worship assemblies. God wants us to be true worshippers, that is, those who offer true worship to Him (John 4:23). One aspect of God-pleasing worship is that it is offered *"in spirit"* (John 4:23,24). When worship is offered *"in spirit,"* it is presented with a proper attitude, a proper focus, a proper motive, and comes sincerely from the heart. The Master spoke of those who honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him (Mark 7:6). If you and I have proper reverence for God, then when we praise Him with spiritual songs, speak to Him in prayers, or take part in any other act of worship, we focus on what we are thinking, saying, and doing — it comes from the heart.

Another manner in which we show our respect for God in a worship gathering is by showing respect for His word. Show me a person that does not respect what God says, and I'll show you a person (that same one!) that really does not respect God

(Luke 6:46).

How is reverence for God's word connected with worship?

1) We must have respect for the Bible's instructions about worship itself. Since true worship is offered *"in truth,"* it is in harmony with what God's truth says (John 4:24; 17:17). That means I ought to care about what the Bible says about worship. Only that which is authorized by the Lord is allowed in worship (Col. 3:17). Making additions to the God-designated worship revealed in the New Testament brings condemnation on those who do the adding.

2) We must show respect for God's word by listening reverently when it is proclaimed faithfully. When Ezra opened and read from God's word, the Jews that were assembled with him stood up and remained standing and listening for hours (Ezra 8:1-9:3). What respect!

3) We must show reverence for God in worship by trying to maintain a serious, reverent atmosphere. I do *not* mean that we ought to refrain from smiling or act like lifeless robots. But, we should care about proper *"worship decorum."* Such calls on each member of the Lord's body to help create and maintain an atmosphere in which every single one of us can focus on the worship that we are offering. We must do everything within our power to keep distractions at a minimum. Why? Because they hinder us from keeping our attention on praising, honoring, and glorifying Jehovah.

What sort of distractions commonly plague modern-day assemblies?

One is playing with or making faces at babies or small children that are seated close to us. Those who do that are certainly not focused on the One on the throne in heaven, and their immature gesturing adversely affects others that observe them.

A second form of distraction is carrying on conversations with those sitting near us. Brothers and sisters, this has to cease! From the first

words spoken in a worship assembly to the end of the closing prayer, there is no place for you or me to *"chat"* with another person in the assembly. Those who do so are coming before the throne of the Almighty with a flippant, irreverent attitude. How can a brother in the Lord be joking around with others during the sermon or singing, then afterwards come forward to lead the Lord's supper or a prayer?! Before God it must be an abomination.

Now we come to a 21st-century distraction in worship that our brethren of past generations did not have to face. What is it? It is the *"all-important"* cell phone. You know, the device that even a 13-year old cannot seem to do without for two hours of Bible class and worship! I would like to go through at least one Bible class or worship assembly this year without having someone's cell phone ring. Can we accomplish that this year, brethren? Is it asking too much to be *focused* on the God of heaven?! Know this: if your phone rings during an assembly, it is not the Lord calling you! Because God does not call on cell phones, then whoever wants to contact me can just wait until after services are over.

I recall one worship assembly in which I watched in horror as the teenage child of a deacon played on her cell phone and sent messages on it. Where were her proud parents? Sitting right beside her. Please, leave the thing outside the building or else turn it to a setting where it makes no noise and does not distract you.

As for me and my house, when we go to worship, we plan to be there and ready to praise God before the first word of the assembly is spoken. And, we intend to stay through the final *"Amen."* At our house we call that respect for God — giving Him our heart for the whole assembly and not just part of it.

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# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

John D. Cotham

***The name “church of Christ” shows possession.***

***It is the church Jesus bought with His precious blood, and it is the only church where He places the saved.***

Names have always been important. Common sense tells us that without names of items, places, animals, or people we would be at a loss for identification. There is another reason — self-esteem! Any husband wants his wife to wear his name. What parent would be pleased if their child wanted to carry a neighbor's last name?

Names have always been important to God and His people: “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created” (Gen. 5:2). God knew Moses by name: “And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name” (Exodus 33:17). The Lord knows us by name today: “But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out” (John 10:2-3).

Names are so important to God that He prophesied a new name for His people under the new covenant: “Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isa. 56:5). “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa. 62:2). That new name would be “Christian.” “...The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Only God had the right to give His people that name. No one has a right to that name without becoming a child of God.

God's people are also known by several other names: 1) *Disciples* — Acts 11:26, 2) *Saints* — “Unto the

church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2), 3) *Brethren* — “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1), 4) *Believers* — “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14), and 5) *Children of God* — “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).

God gave certain names for His people as a collective group: 1) *the church* — “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). 2) *the body* — “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1:18), 3) *the whole family* — “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:15), 4) *the household of God* — “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19), 5) *the church of God* — “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28), 6) *the body of Christ* — “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

One of the most important names for God's people is one which declares it to be the possession of Christ Himself. The church (the

body) is literally called the *church of Christ*. “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). Of all the names, this would seem the most pertinent. This name of all names shows the relationship of Christ to His church. He bought it: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). He paid dearly for it — His own life's blood! Peter reminds us: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed (bought) with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Nowhere in God's word do we find the names of most religious bodies of today; names such as: Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, the Lord's Chapel, the House of Prayer, and the list goes on and on. All these are a mockery of Christ's church. Names are important to God. He gave only those He approves, and he did not name any of the above. What's in a name? It shows possession.

To call an animal a “cat” means it is possessive of the “cat” family. In the case of a wife or children taking the last name of the husband or father, it shows possession; they belong to the husband or father. The name “church of Christ” shows possession. It is the church Jesus bought with His precious blood, and it is the only church where He places the saved. It is no wonder that God is proud of his church and its name.

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## SEEK THE OLD PATHS

“Thank you for a great paper. I recently sent money and failed to send instructions for its use. Use it for what you need most to help with the paper. Please don’t send any thanks to my address” ...**AR.** “I would like to receive *Seek The Old Paths*. I was receiving it, but I moved and I haven’t got one since March. I really enjoy getting it every month. I hope to start receiving it again. May God continually bless you in this good work. My God bless you” ...**Betty Long, Glencoe, AL.** “Jim M. Foust has passed away” ...**Pikeville, TN.** “I’m writing in reference to the March/2011 issue of STOP. I didn’t receive my copy for that month. I would also like for you to start sending the paper to the address included below. Will send contribution to help with the paper. Thank you so much” ...**Geneva Stark, Eufaula, OK.** “Hope all is fine there. Things are great here. I’ve moved, so here is my new address so I can continue to receive STOP. Keep spreading the truth” ...**Jerry Hawkins, Huntsville, AL.** “I wish you would put these brethren on the mailing list to receive *Seek The Old Paths*. I want to introduce it to some family members and other Christians on this side of the Mississippi River that will appreciate it. Thanks” ...**Stephen Wiggins, San Augustine, TX.** “Brother Robinson, thank you for adding my name to your mailing list. Enclosed is a check. I am a member of the church of Christ on Azalea Drive in North Charleston, SC. Brother Bobby Lee Green, Jr. is our minister” ...**Isadore Boags, Jr., North Charleston, SC.** “I would like to receive your paper, *Seek The Old Paths*. My sisters receive it and they say it is great! I work with Bible Correspondences, also have some prison Christians. I collect material such as yours, make copies and mail it with my lesson. Keep up the good work! If there’s a charge, I will be happy to make a contribution” ...**Wilene Sullivaan, Manchester, TN.** [NOTE: There is no charge for *Seek The Old Paths*. We operate on the free-will contributions of individuals and congregations. We are so thankful for all those who make this work possible through their generous gifts. Our funds are running a bit low right now, so if any are able to help, now would be a good time to do so. Thanks.] “Dear brother Robinson, someone gave me a copy of STOP and I appreciate it very much. I would like for you to put me on the mailing list” ...**Kathleen Rogol, Murfreesboro, TN.** “Recently, I read a copy of *Seek The Old Paths*.” I enjoyed reading it. I would like to receive it by mail. Will you please add me to your mailing list? Thank you so much” ...**Wendell Smallwood, Cookeville, TN.** “I certainly appreciate receiving STOP and am thankful for the sound brethren writers that contribute to every edition. Use this small amount to help in any way” ...**Dan Huffines, Gainesboro, TN.** “You can cancel the bundle you’ve been sending to the church building. They are not being picked up by the members” ...**Talledega church of Christ, Talledega, AL.** “Hello brother Robinson, We are grateful for your good work with STOP and enjoy reading each issue. The church here is already receiving a monthly bundle of STOP so you can remove my personal subscription from your mailing list. Thank you” ...**Maurice Brown, Rockford IL.** “Please begin sending a bundle of STOP to the church here. Thank you and God bless” ...**Noland Church of Christ, Poca-hontas, AR.** “Greetings in His precious name! We hope and pray this finds you in good health and joy in the Lord. We want you to know we have appreciated so very much *Seek The Old Paths* and want to thank you and all who are involved in furthering the cause of Christ. We got to know you while living in Pensacola, Florida quite a few years ago. We’re moved a few times since then and a couple of weeks ago we moved again so please change the address when you mail STOP. May God bless you and family in a very special way for all the efforts you put forth to further His kingdom. We sometimes do not realize what a blessing it is

to have Jesus the Christ as a wonderful friend and saviour. God bless and keep you in His care. We appreciate all you do” ...**Lewis & Christine Blair, Franklin, TN.** “Thank you very much” ...**Pearl Kirk, Celina, TN.** “Please change our address for STOP” ...**R. F. Knox, Princeton, WV.** “Please remove my name from the STOP mailing list. Do not print my name” ...**Pikeville, KY.**

## RESTORATION OF THE WAYWARD TO CHRIST

The prophet Ezekiel relayed the message of God to Israel through the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 that they would be restored to the Promised Land and offer sacrifice and worship once again in Jerusalem. This vision of dry bones coming back to life, forming an army, revived their hope. They felt they were as dry bones piled in the desert, all life gone, all hope gone. But, just as the power of Jehovah could bring those bones to life — so too could God bring His people back to life and restore them to their home. The people needed to do what those bones did: HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD. In much the same way, those who are separated from God by their sins can find life and life more abundantly if they will: HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD. The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, the shedding of the blood of the Lamb of God redeemed our souls so that we might receive grace and mercy” ...**Rod Ross, 4345 Lawrence Dr. NW, Baltimore, OH 43105.**

*Seek The Old Paths* is a monthly publication of the **East End Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is mailed FREE upon request. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless otherwise noted. Articles are also welcomed.

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