

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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INESCAPABLE THINGS

Henry Simmons (deceased)

Although the bodies of men and brute beasts are composed of essentially the same elements, there is a considerable difference in the composition of the *whole man* as compared to that of the lower animals. *Man-kind was the crowning glory of God's physical creation*, and although man's physical body is subject to corruption and decay and will inevitably return to its basic components, man is much more than physical — man is also spiritual. You see, when God created man, He created him "in His own image," thus man is also endowed with an "immortal spirit." In addition to an immortal spirit, man also received some other characteristics which distinguished him as being unique among God's creation. One of those characteristics is the *power of volition* — the power to choose. Since with this "power of volition" man was endowed with a brain capable of "reasoning," man is lifted above being directed through this life solely on "instinct." Thus, there are many things in this life in which man has a choice. One of these choices is whether to serve God, or not to serve God. No man is *forced* to serve God. As Joshua declared in the long ago, "Choose you this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

While there are many things and many ways that we can choose, our choice inevitably brings us face to face with some facts that we cannot escape! Note just a few:

WE CANNOT ESCAPE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

One thing the Bible stresses is that man is accountable to God for his actions. He has always held men accountable to Himself for their conduct. *Accountability* involves *responsibility*, thus man is held personally responsible for his own conduct. We cannot shift our personal responsibility to someone else! Note: Adam tried to shift blame for his conduct to Eve; Eve tried to shift hers to the serpent — but God held them both responsible for their personal conduct, and they each had to suffer the consequences. King Saul tried to blame the people for his failure (1 Sam. 15:5), but God held him personally responsible for his own sin. We may try to shift the blame for our own failures to someone else, but we cannot escape the results of our own unwise decisions and our rebellious conduct toward God.

"The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). "Each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his *own* lust and enticed" (James 1:14).

WE CANNOT ESCAPE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb. 2:2-3).

WE CANNOT ESCAPE DEATH

"...It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Life is short and uncertain (Heb. 9:27). "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:1-2). "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

WE CANNOT ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). A personal accounting: "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).



Editorial...

DANCING AND SUCH LIKE

Garland M. Robinson

The Greek word *aselgeia* involves lustful, lewd, suggestive, indecent bodily movements and/or the touching or handling of others inappropriately. In the New Testament it is translated “*lasciviousness*” (Mark 7:22; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3; Jude 1:4), “*wantonness*” (Rom. 13:13; 2 Peter 2:18) and “*filthy*” (2 Peter 2:7). The condemnation of God is announced upon those who commit this grievous sin. Modern dancing certainly fits the definition of *aselgeia*. But what about dancing at weddings or square dancing or other types of so-called “fun dancing” such as the Hokey Pokey and things of that nature?

The point about dancing being sinful is not actually the “dancing” itself, per se. It’s like swimming, there’s nothing inherently sinful about swimming. But it’s what goes on in mixed company (and sometimes the same company) that can make dancing, swimming and all “such like” activities wrong and sinful.

Dancing, swimming, cheer leading, and any other such-like thing that involves suggestive or indecent bodily movements and/or immodest dress, lends itself to lust. Lust is sinful when one “dwells” upon it in their mind. Sinful thoughts are contrary to pure, chaste, blameless, holy thoughts. No one can absolutely prevent a lustful thought from crossing their mind — such is natural. But the point is, do we dwell on it? Do we consider it more and more? Do we look for opportunities to see more? Do we wish we had the opportunity to carry out our secret dreams?

The Bible says we can sin by just thinking of something in our mind, even though we don’t follow through with the action. The Lord said, “...whosoever looks upon a woman **to lust after her** hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Potiphar’s wife lusted

after Joseph and sought to fulfill her lust with him. It started when she “...**cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me**” (Gen. 39:7). Joseph was innocent in regards to her sin. He did not contribute to it. He did not tease her. As a matter of fact, he did not even want to be around her. Genesis 39:10 says, “*And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.*” It was her sin, not his. However, he would have contributed to her sin by acting provocatively, seductively, sexy. His dress or undress or indecent bodily movements (lasciviousness) would have promoted her lustful desires. In that case, he would not be innocent in their great wickedness and sin against God (Gen. 39:9). James 1:15 says, “...*when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*” We can’t control another’s lustful thoughts, but we better not contribute to it by our dress or actions and then claim we’re innocent in the matter! Jesus never dressed or acted in a way that caused others to lust after him and neither should we.

All temptation comes through one or more of three areas: 1) the lust of the flesh, 2) the lust of the eyes and 3) the vain glory (pride) of life (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Every possible sin is a result of one fulfilling their lustful desires in one or more of these three areas. Jesus was tempted in all three areas (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:15). But, he did not “dwell upon” or “give in” to the temptation. Therefore, did not sin (1 Peter 2:22).

If we could be absolutely guaranteed and assured that we do not sin in our minds when we dance, swim, or any action that promotes lustful thoughts, then we could say that we’ve done no wrong in our own heart by participating in dancing, swimming, etc. But then, another point must be considered. Can we say

we have not promoted, excited or contributed to our dancing partner having lustful thoughts? No, we can’t say that. What about others present that see me (us) dance? Have their minds remained pure and holy? We must also consider our influence and example. If I’m pure myself, but act in such a way that causes others to sin, then I’m just as guilty as they are. We know Jesus did not sin himself, but did he ever act in such a way that contributed toward others being tempted to sin? Was his influence on others always pure? Certainly it was. Would he involve himself in any activity that might excite others to lustful desires? If he did so, he would have sinned. But since the Lord never sinned, neither was any guile ever found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22), we know he never contributed to anyone’s sin.

In our minds, we generally think of dancing at a wedding, square dancing, hokey pokey and other such activities is not as bad as the vulgar, lewd dancing done by the masses. However, as for me, I don’t want to even remotely put myself in a situation where I could possibly cause another person to sin. There’s no reason for me to do that. I can avoid doing it. I’m committing no sin by avoiding it. So, I don’t do it. Shall we see how close we can get to sin without sinning? I don’t think so!

Those who cause others to sin are not guiltless. They bare responsibility too. They will be judged accordingly. The power of influence and example is undeniable. Jesus warned his disciples to not be influenced by the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:6; Luke 12:1). He knew full well that a little leaven spreads to others (Gal. 5:9). Galatians 5:7 speaks of those who had been hindered by others. The actions and words of others can overthrow our faith if we’re influenced by them (2 Tim. 2:17-18). There are many enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18).

Hebrews 13:4 says that marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled. This says that whatever husband and wife do in privacy is their business. This would include dancing, swimming, etc. They certainly can desire one another, lust after one another and can fulfill that desire without sinning. But, can they do in

“public” what they have the privilege to do as husband and wife in “private”? Could they dance (or swim) in public without causing others to sin? Maybe so, maybe not. We have no control over what others think. But, that’s the point. We can’t control other people’s thoughts or actions. Therefore, they do not have the liberty to do anything they want in public

because their actions may very well excite others to lust and desire to fulfill that lust which causes them to sin. I’ve used the example of swimming because of the skimpy, immodest attire, that is worn. Even if one is fully clothed while swimming, one’s clothes, when wet, cling to the body and highlight areas that cause others to lust. If we can swim in private,

that’s fine; but in public, we may very well cause others to sin. The same is true of dancing. If we cause others to sin, then we are guilty too. First Thessalonians 5:22 says to avoid all appearance of evil.

As Christians, we must not see how close we can get to sin without committing it. That’s not what the Lord wants us to do.

GOD WANTS HIS PREACHERS TO CARE ABOUT PEOPLE

Roger D. Campbell

Preaching is not about being popular. It is not about getting a paycheck. It is not about prestige. It is not about pensions. Preaching is not about pounding the pulpit. A Gospel preacher might preach the truth, enthusiastically pound the pulpit, be paid well, have a pension plan, and be popular in the process. Yet, if he does his teaching and preaching without genuine care for those with whom he works, then his efforts are all for naught. Why? Because God wants His preachers to care about people.

Jesus cared about those whom He taught. What was Jesus’ motive in telling the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give it to the poor? The Bible says of this incident, “Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast...” (Mark 10:21). Jesus said what He did out of love for the young man.

There were times when the Christ sternly rebuked His apostles, yet they always knew that He loved them. The Bible tells us that He “loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). More than once He verbalized His love for them, as when He told them, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

The apostle Paul taught about the need for God’s preachers to care about people, showing compassion and gentleness. By the Spirit he instructed Timothy, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in

opposition...” (2 Tim. 2:24,25, NKJV). Paul also taught this truth in the example that he set for others. He declared, “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved” (2 Cor. 12:15). In that same chapter, Paul wrote, “...we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying” (v.19). Not everyone in the church at Corinth “was crazy about” Paul, but none could honestly doubt his genuine care for them.

The manner in which Paul dealt with the saints in Thessalonica clearly showed his concern for their well-being as well. “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:7,8). Paul was concerned about each one of them as individuals: “As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children” (2:11). Yes, Paul not only taught the truth, but he really cared about those whom he taught — striving to preach the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

The Bible makes it clear that God wants His preachers to care about people. Come to think of it, does not the word of God teach that not only preachers, but all Christians, ought to care about people? It does indeed. All Christians are instructed to be kind and tender-hearted (Eph. 4:32), as well as showing compassion and courtesy to others (1 Peter 3:8).

God wants His preachers to care about people. It is equally true that our Lord wants all of His followers to love others, desiring the very best for them.

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Elder's COLUMN

THE WORK OF PREACHERS

Tom House

Many of our brethren have developed a number of misconceptions regarding the primary duties of an evangelist.

The writer was recently posed a question: “what do you consider to be the work of a preacher?” The response was obvious: “preach the Gospel.” The inquisitor was then more specific: “Name five things that could aptly be incorporated into the work of a preacher.” This request proves to be rather interesting. The reason to consider the request as being significant results from the perceptions which many have come to possess over the years regarding the primary responsibility which rests upon those who proclaim the Gospel of Christ. This, of course implies, and has proved to be the case through the years, that many of our brethren have developed a number of misconceptions regarding the primary duties of an evangelist. The implication, indeed, has credence. On many occasions, preachers themselves have been the unwitting promoters of many of the misconceptions. On other occasions, some of our leaders have assigned duties to the preacher; some of which the leaders themselves are actually responsible, being the shepherds. Additionally, some of the assignments are so numerous, that the burden placed on the preacher is to such an extent that he cannot be proficient in the duty to which he is primarily to be engaged — preaching. Consequently, the effort from the pulpit suffers; resulting in a weak-fed flock. While it is the case, most anyone can read a pre-written manuscript, and thus be relieved from what effort is required to produce a series of cogent thoughts, and then proficiently deliver those thoughts; one should to be aware of the fact that the “work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5) is precisely that — WORK! How then, may the work of an evangelist be described? How extensive are his duties?

When asked to provide about five things which describe the work of a preacher, there were several others involved in the conversation and all gave answers. The consensus of those answering was the following: 1) *preach the Gospel to the lost*; 2) *edify the saved*; 3) *warn the brethren of impending threats to the faith and their faith*; 4) *defend the faith*; 5) *be an example to the believers*.

It should be obvious even to the casual observer, that the answers have their foundation in Scripture. The reason for this notation is that regardless of the opinion of the writer or that of any other, the Bible will provide the information necessary to come to a truthful conclusion regarding the “work of an evangelist.” The fact is that the apostle Paul would not have offered the admonition to Timothy without providing the means to understand what was involved in such a work. As well, the answers which will be addressed here, for the most part, are considered as general in scope and in no wise comprise every aspect of the preacher’s work.

It should be understood at the outset of this study that there are responsibilities which are assigned to each child of God. To list and examine all of them would require volumes. The church consists of a host of members; all of whom, by virtue of various circumstances, have different duties. The apostle Paul, when writing to the Ephesian brethren, classified some of the different roles which comprise the membership of the body of Christ: “*And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers*” (Eph. 4:11). It is obvious that some of those things listed were peculiar to the period of the first century; namely apostles and prophets.

These were clearly exclusive to the period of inspiration. However, the others of those listed will remain until the Lord returns. The term “pastors” is from the Greek word *poimen*, which means “shepherd;” and refers to the office of the bishop or elder. The term “teacher” is translated from *didaskalos* which is referring to an instructor, or the master of a class. The word “evangelist” is from *euaggelistes* which simply refers to one who is a Gospel preacher. Not mentioned in this text is the office of a deacon, which is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3. The reason for noting these distinctive terms is to note the distinctive functions which are peculiar to each position. As noted earlier, there are responsibilities which are shared by each of those in these classes as well as those who comprise the general membership. For example, **a preacher should visit the sick and the bereaved; not because he is the preacher, but because he is a Christian!** It is likewise errant thinking to conclude that because one is not the preacher, that he is excused from such responsibility.

Even with some of the distinctive positions which are noted, there are some overlapping duties. However, it should also be understood, that each of these positions or offices exists because the Lord knew that the work of the church is such that no one or two people can accomplish all that is necessary with any degree of success. For the church to reach any level of achievement, it will require each member using their particular talents, and those in qualified positions of leadership, fulfilling their roles according to God’s divine plan.

In the effort to examine the duties of an evangelist, it is imperative to understand those things

which are *not* his sole responsibility.

Obviously, one must consider that the particular circumstances vary with each congregation of the Lord's church. There are congregations which have **no elders**. In such cases, *it is not the responsibility of the preacher to assume the sole role of leadership in the congregation*. It has been the assumption among the members in some congregations without elders, that the preacher should fill this role. In other situations, the brethren would rightly refuse to agree to such a practice; but in assigning the preacher his duties, many having unwittingly placed him in a position where, in essence, he becomes the "pastor." Clearly, in circumstances where there are congregations without elders, the men must lead. Considering the fact that the preacher is one of the men, it would be appropriate for him to have a role of leading in the work, but he should not use his position as the preacher to usurp authority over the men of the congregation. The reader can readily see the divine wisdom in each congregation having qualified men to serve in the roles as "overseers."

The same conclusion should be reached when considering the role of a preacher in a congregation **with elders**. *He should not assume that his position as the evangelist supercedes that of the elders*. This scenario has been repeated on far too many occasions; and has wreaked havoc wherever it has been tried. Paul stated that the elders were the "overseers" (Acts 20:28) and were responsible for "feeding the flock." Clearly, the elders are responsible for the spiritual diet of the flock they lead. Preachers are one of the tools which elders use to ensure that responsibility is met. As the spiritual shepherds, they are to see that the sheep are being fed a spiritually wholesome and spiritually nutritious diet.

Unless it is the case that there are full-time elders, generally speaking, the preacher is the one devoted to the full-time work in the congregation. Hence, doing his own work, he will supplement the work of the elders rather than displacing them. A logical conclusion in this respect would suggest that unless the preacher is appointed as one of the elders, he should not be doing the

work of an elder. The same is to be said of the office of a deacon; in that, unless qualified and appointed to the position, he should not assume to do the work which has been assigned to the deacons.

While much space could be employed to discuss things that generally do not comprise the primary duty of the preacher, the present task is, however, to examine what things do. The apostle Paul will take opportunity with his experience to reveal to the young Timothy what is involved in being an evangelist. His admonition to the young man in 2 Timothy 4, remains to serve as an inspired outline for any who would seek to be a Gospel preacher. Paul will "charge" ("to attest earnestly"), in verse one, that in doing "the work of evangelist" (v.5), it would obviously begin with his effort to "preach the word" (v.2). While this admonition seems rather general, closer examination will reveal otherwise.

In Luke 10, the Lord appoints seventy others, in addition to the twelve, to send them out into the different cities to further the message concerning Himself and the coming kingdom. The need to herald the message was clearly defined — "the harvest is truly great" (v.2). Jesus was helping these appointees understand that the world was in desperate need of the information they would be providing. The souls of men were the focus of His mission (Luke 19:10). But His effort to "seek and to save" would have its physical limitations. Alone, He would not be able to cover as near as much ground as having scores of others to act under His authority and on His behalf. Additionally, the Lord would not tread this earth but for a very short period. With the need so "great" and the laborers so few, the effort to reach the world with the Lord's message would require men not only dedicated to following the Lord, but dedicated to the same mission — "to seek and to save."

The Lord was not hesitant to tell the seventy that the mission assigned to them would certainly be perilous. To this, they would need to be keenly aware. He will tell them that He is sending them "forth as lambs among wolves." The Biblical record, as well as historical records, indicates that those who were antag-

onistic to the cause of Christ preyed on the early evangelists with a vengeance. Regardless, by the time Luke writes the history of the early church in the book of Acts, the brethren were "scattered" everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

The charge that Jesus gave to the seventy was that they were to take the message that "the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:9). Today, while it is the case that the kingdom has been present for nearly two millennium, the need to preach its arrival along side the good news of Christ, has not diminished. In fact, it is to this very purpose, that the words to Timothy are penned in 2 Timothy 4.

Timothy is told to "*preach the word*." The word "preach" is from the Greek word *kerusso* meaning "to herald" (as a public crier). What is one to preach? Paul answers — "the word." But what word? The term is *logos*, which is the same term as found in John 1:1. It is used in that text in reference to Christ. This fact is rather significant because the subject of one's preaching is not exclusive to the what, but the Who, as well. It is interesting to note that there are those who are of the impression that one can preach Christ and disregard that which He preached. While it is the case that one can focus on matters concerning the life of Christ, one cannot "preach Christ" without preaching what He taught. Such is clearly indicated by the situation with Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8. When Philip "preached Jesus" to the eunuch (v.35), it was evident that he focused on more than the life and death of Christ. He taught him the necessity of baptism; otherwise the eunuch would have not inquired of its necessity. It is additionally important to note that Jesus gave His commission to "teach all nations" and thus make disciples of them. He will furthermore tell them to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). What would be the importance of preaching these commands and following them? The answer is, because it will be by His words that all will be judged (John 12:48).

The phrase "**preach the word**" in 2 Timothy 4:2, has further significance based on the article "the" — "The" word. It signifies that the Lord

has only one Gospel message. Paul marveled at some in Galatia for giving credence to some other message than that which he had preached to them (Gal. 1:6-9). He will specifically tell them that there is “no other” Gospel than that one he had preached. It is this same message, without addition or subtraction, that is to be preached today.

Second, *the work of an evangelist is to edify the saved*. The word “edify” comes from the Greek term *oikodome* (noun) or *oikodomeo* (verb), which is an architectural term indicating “to build” or “build up.” Life experiences consistently reveal that man is beset with trials. It is no less the case with Christians. Situations arise which exploit weaknesses, cause great discouragement or bring significant sorrow. When occasions which cause sorrow arise, it is always comforting to have someone reassure us with words from the Book of books that things are not as bad as they might seem. When beset with despair, a skilled preacher can cite passages and examples which can “build up” the spirit of the down-trodden. Many brethren will experience occasions of weaknesses of various sorts; whether it be weak in morality, weak in faithfulness, weak in prayer, or in any area wherein one could be viewed as weak in spirituality. Several of the churches of Asia whom the Lord addressed in the early chapters of Revelation had their strengths, but were chastened for their particular weaknesses. On such occasions, any preacher worth his salt, will admonish the weak, address the weaknesses, will “correct,” and “instruct in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16); so that the Christian may be “perfect,” and “thoroughly furnished unto every good work.”

Third, *preachers are to warn the flock of impending threats to the faith*. There was probably no greater evangelist in the first century than in the person of the apostle Paul. He spent much of his writing addressing threats to the cause of Christ. In several of his letters he devoted significant space to the problem caused by Judaizers. He would tell Timothy of the problems being caused by Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus with their false teaching on the resurrection. The apostle John would use ample space to address the prob-

lems associated with Gnosticism.

Failure to address issues which can potentially cause division in the body of Christ or which could result in the loss of someone’s soul; whether on the part of an elder or the preacher, makes either, or both, complicit in the problem. The failure of the preacher to stand for that which is truth, is for all practical purposes allowing the wolf into the sheep-fold or allowing the flock to feed on poison. In either case, the result will be a spiritual catastrophe.

Fourth in the list of general duties of a preacher is that *he should be a capable defender of the faith*. One cannot help but reflect on the circumstances of the old prophet Elijah as he stood alone against the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). His effort was not only that of faith and courage in defending the faith of the one true God, but much to the point that the prophets of Baal were given sufficient latitude that they made themselves look absolutely foolish. In so doing, Elijah was able to draw a distinct contrast between himself and the false prophets; so much so, that the people of Israel were able to clearly discern the truth from the error.

Many preachers today have chosen to take the path of least resistance. Most, it seems, are so stricken with timidity, that on the occasions which a sound defense would have been required, they will cower away into hiding, while others react with complete indifference. To be clear, confrontation with error is neither pleasant nor convenient, but in order to maintain the purity of the faith, and guard the souls of the flock from spiritual predators, someone must take steps to provide the defense. A familiar text from the short epistle of Jude provides an inspired directive in respect of this need: “*It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (v.3). While it is uncertain to whom Jude was specifically addressing, seeing that the language is inclusive of Christians in general, it will certainly include those who are preachers in its scope. As noted earlier, preachers are usually the ones in any given congregation, who are given to the full-time work in the congregation. If

any should be prepared for being in the first line of defending the faith, it should be him. Some might cite the need for the elders taking the front line of defense. This would certainly be true, for being the shepherds they are responsible for the protection of the flock. However, shepherds would use what tools were available to them in order to ward off threats to the sheep, such as staves or swords, etc. Likewise, shepherds in the spiritual Israel may turn to one of their tools to provide a means to defend the spiritual sheep from danger — the well-prepared preacher! By any estimation, the preacher should be “*ready always to give an answer*” to any one who inquires of his hope, and then be able to defend his reasoning for that which he has answered (1 Peter 3:15).

Preachers today would do well in learning a lesson from the example of Elijah. While we do not beseech fire from heaven to make the case of truth today; having the complete source of inspiration at our disposal, preachers are able to avail themselves of its divine truth and thereby “instruct in righteousness,” bringing men into spiritual maturity, and uphold the one and only system of faith which will provide passage to heaven (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Finally, in this simple list of things which, in general terms, outlines a preacher’s responsibility, is the fact that *he should be an example of the righteousness he preaches*. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul noted his personal accountability in this respect. He stated: “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*” (1 Cor. 9:27). Paul was aware as anyone that there is nothing more debilitating to a cause than those who promote the cause should violate the foundational principles of the cause. Hypocrisy is the death-knell to a cause. The “cause” in this case is the “cause” of Christ. Paul knew that if he preached principles of righteousness to any group of people, and then behaved in an unrighteous manner, he would destroy the credibility of the message he preached. In his epistle to Timothy, he will outline several aspects of behavior that he will need to apply in order that he might save

himself and those who listened to him (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul will urge Timothy that he not behave himself in such a fashion as to allow others to despise him in his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was told to “*be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*” In virtually every aspect of his life, Timothy was admonished to serve as an appropriate example. As an evangelist, Timothy could provide not only the teaching the people would need by word of

mouth, but he could also provide significant instruction by the way he lived in harmony with that which he preached. While some might wonder why this portion is included in a discussion on the WORK of an evangelist; if one would but consider how difficult it is in this present world to live a righteous life, the answer would be glaring. It takes great effort to “be an example.”

There are likely many other specific matters which might have well been considered, but these which

have been examined should be food for thought for those who have had questions about the particular roles which are to be embraced by those who wish to be preachers in the Lord’s kingdom.

It would seem to be appropriate to end with Paul’s quote of Isaiah; “*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things*” (Rom. 10:15; Isa. 52:7).

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MAY THE SINNER PRAY FOR SALVATION?

Matthew Carver

Not one example of conversion portrays an inspired preacher of the Gospel instructing others to pray in order to become a child of God. Instead, what we find are three common elements throughout each account in an either explicit or implicit form: faith, repentance, baptism.

The almost exclusive means by which denominations purport to instruct men to transition from a life of sin and depravity to a life that is “hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3), is by way of the “Sinner’s Prayer.” On most denominational tracts and websites, the formula requiring the sinner to “ask Jesus into your heart” through prayer is seemingly ever present. Likewise, every widely heralded television and radio evangelist with denominational associations seems to employ this method of salvation. However, is such the model proclaimed and defended within the inspired text of the New Testament?

In scanning every conversion account in the book of Acts, we cannot find a single instance in which an inquiring penitent person was instructed to pray for salvation. This should not be construed as a blind and dogmatic statement of a fact that we simply wish to be true. Rather, it is the empirical reality of the case. Not one example of conversion portrays an inspired preacher of the Gospel instructing others to pray in order to become a child of God. Instead, what we find are three common elements throughout each account in an either explicit or implicit form: faith, repentance, bap-

tism. In addition to these, we may rightly infer from other inspired sources that a confession of one’s faith in Christ was also required (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12). Noticeably absent from these conditions is the requirement to pray. As a matter of fact, the only account that even remotely alludes to prayer is when Ananias instructed Saul of Tarsus: “*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). The instruction was to cease praying, arise, be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

In addition to these observations, there exists certain inherent flaws in the teaching of salvation by prayer. If a sinner is to pray for salvation, for what, specifically, is he to pray for along this line? Is he to pray for *faith*? No, for the Bible teaches that “*...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17). Further, if one is praying for faith, he is obviously praying without faith. Consequently, the Bible teaches that such a man cannot expect to receive anything from God, for James writes: “*But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man*

think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

Should the sinner pray for *repentance*? No, for repentance is an act of the heart: “*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death*” (2 Cor. 7:10).

Does he pray for *remission of sins*? No, for remission of sins is promised only to those who obey in faith, repentance, and water baptism: “*...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*” (Acts 2:38). Thus, the Scriptures bear witness that there is nothing for which the sinner can pray in regards to salvation that has not already been assigned to other conditions in the Book of God.

Let us then commit these observations to memory in order that we may “*...be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*” (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE PREACHERS GONE?

Information from various sources continues to tell us that the number of preachers in the U.S., especially among churches of Christ, is declining. Some figures are extremely alarming, such as the revelation that the Lord’s church is losing some 600 preachers per year, due to death, retirement and career changes, and all our schools combined produce a meager 300 replacements annually. It does not take a brilliant accountant to quickly surmise where this sad road shall end.

It’s my personal belief that most of our preachers are just plain quitting the full time ministry due to bad treatment from brethren or unrealistic expectations placed upon them or for other similar reasons. There are no doubt some who have regrettably fallen in love with the world and have done a “Demas number,” leaving behind all hope of eternal salvation. We pray for them that their sensibilities shall be reclaimed. However, the dismal fact remains that there is a preacher shortfall and that puts the spotlight of inquiry on such

questions as, “Will the church of Christ survive?” “How can any religious movement be optimistic regarding its future if it does not attract those of the younger age brackets?” “How can any religious group exist without a solid core of professional men who have devoted themselves to countless hours of the study of God’s Word and are ready to meet the neo-paganistic world on any terms or topics it names?”

Bill McDonough states the critical issue as follows: “Today there is no higher calling than preaching or greater crisis than the lack of preachers. We and our children can stop the church from dying in America, but we are the only ones who can.” (*Gospel Advocate*, April, 2002). These words are ever so true. Is it possible to treat our preachers better? (This is not to say some men in the pulpits did not deserve exactly what they received!) Rudeness, unjust treatment and discourtesy are incompatible with Christian character wherever they are found.

Beloved, let us extol the glory and greatness of preaching and encourage our young men to want to be proclaimers of the Word of Life. Let us emphasize anew Jehovah’s dynamic call as in the days of old: “*And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none*” (Ezek. 22:30). Who will be God’s man? What will your congregation do to encourage young men to fill the empty pulpits? Can we do some heart searching that will lead to some life changing to show how absolutely vital our preachers are to the ongoing of all that is good in the earth? One thing is for certain; wherever our preachers are going, the church is soon to follow! God give us preachers. God save the church. — *Bill Dillon*

It bears repeating: “When shepherds speak well of the wolves, the sheep are in grave danger.”

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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