

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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UNREST, UPRISING, AND REVOLT

Rusty Stark

Our world is in the midst of widespread unrest. Citizens of various nations are rising up against their own governments. In some cases, tyrants are toppling and being taken over by other tyrants. There are also common people taking part in violent protests to overthrow their government.

On the one hand, brutal dictators, tyrants, and despots are clearly in violation of righteous principles. It is God's will that rulers be a terror to evil, not to good (Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14). Those who are a terror to the righteous and those who harbor and support evildoers are not right in God's sight.

But on the other hand, the question before us now is whether or not it is proper for Christians to engage in acts of civil disobedience and even violence to overthrow the government — even an evil one.

THE RULE OF GOVERNMENT IS AUTHORIZED BY GOD

Romans 13:1-7 says, *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for*

good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to [execute] wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore [ye] must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute [is due]; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

Romans 13:4 talks about the government bearing the sword as a minister of God. For civilization to exist, for law and order to prevail, someone must have the power of enforcement and punishment. Police can and should use force in the course of duty in order to thwart those who would do evil or to capture and punish those who have done evil.

A government can and should protect its citizens from evildoers, even by the use of military might. Our government certainly had every right to fight against Hitler, and to punish the evil deeds of Usama Bin Laden. God's word gives governments the right of punishing evildoers (even other governments who are evil). However, He does not give that right to individuals.

OUR OWN HISTORY

This question is one which can easily become clouded in the minds of Americans. Not only was our nation born out of revolt and uprising, we

have been taught to be proud of that fact. But the truth of God's word can never be proven by appealing to past behavior. If something is wrong, we must not justify it under the guise of "patriotism."

TAXES, SUBMISSION AND CIVIL OBEDIENCE

Here is an important point of truth — regardless of all attempts to justify otherwise: Christians are to pay taxes. Romans 13:6 says, *"For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers."* It is not enough simply to argue that the tax is unfair. Nor do we have the right to refuse to pay simply because we are taxed without representation. Christians pay their taxes. If Paul commanded the people of his day to pay tax to an empire as evil as that of Rome, there is no excuse for Christians to refuse to pay taxes to their government.

Here is another truth that we must accept and follow: Christians are to be people of civil obedience, submitting themselves to governmental authority. We are not a people of civil disobedience.

Note the following passages:

1 Tim. 2:2, we are to pray for those in authority *"that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life."*

Titus 3:1, *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready*

(Continued on page 75)

Unrest, Uprising, and Revolt...



Editorial...

CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE OR CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Garland M. Robinson

There's a world of difference between those who abide in the kingdoms of the world and those who have been called out of them — called out of the world of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (cf. Col. 1:13). In the world we were children of disobedience (cf. Eph 2:2); but, in the kingdom of Christ (the church), we are children of light (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5). God's wrath is upon the disobedient — those who walk as in the night (Eph. 5:6). Faithful Christians are not of the darkness, they are of the light.

Jesus said of himself, *"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness"* (John 12:46). The Lord told Saul of Tarsus that He was sending him unto the Gentiles (those in the world of darkness), *"To open their eyes, [and] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of Satan unto God..."* (Acts 26:18). There's obviously a difference between the people of the world and the people of the Lord (Christians).

As servants of the Lord, we are to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light (Rom. 13:12). We *"...are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness"* (1 Thess. 5:5). Since we are now light in the Lord, we are to walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8). Light can have no communion (fellowship) with darkness (2 Cor. 6:14).

First Peter chapter two tells us how to live. It speaks of our conduct — our attitude and disposition of life. Our manner of life is to be *"...honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by [your] good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"* (1 Peter 2:12). We are to submit ourselves to *"...every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake:*

whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using [your] liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (1 Peter 2:13-16).

These verses do not tell us to take to the streets in violent protest to the government. There's no mention of rock throwing, destruction of property and general mayhem. When we see news reports all around the world of countries in turmoil, its citizens embroiled in insurrection, we can't imagine in a million years of Christians being in that number. Instead, 1 Timothy 2:2 tells us to pray *"for kings, and [for] all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."*

The Lord's kingdom is a **kingdom of peace**. Isaiah 2:4 speaks of the citizens of the kingdom (the church) by saying, *"...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."* The behavior and attitude of people before becoming Christians was to use instruments of war and violence such as swords and spears. But after becoming Christians, they converted them into implements of agriculture such as plowshares and pruninghooks. The Lord's people do not take to the streets yelling and screaming, calling for trouble and instability. The Lord's people are absolutely no threat to anyone in the world, certainly not a government or nation. We serve a new king, the Lord Jesus Christ. We attend to a new rule, the way of righteousness and purity.

Paul spoke of some in the first century who thought Christians acted like everyone else, that they

lived according to the flesh (worldly minded), doing the same things people of the world did. However, Paul appealed to the conduct of our Lord. His was an example of meekness and gentleness. That was not only the Lord's disposition, it is the way Christians are to act. The Word of the Lord is, *"...though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Christians do not behave like the rest of the world. The battle Christians wage is a spiritual battle, fought with spiritual weapons, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of people everywhere. The Gospel subdues the very mind, the very thoughts of an individual, and brings them under control to the obedience of Christ.

The Lord's kingdom is governed by **the Gospel of peace**. It is a new law, the Gospel of Jesus the Christ. Romans 10:15 says, *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"* As citizen of the kingdom of peace, a soldier of Jesus Christ, our feet are *"shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"* (Eph. 6:15). Jesus said his disciples would march to a new commandment. It is a new and novel concept as far as the world is concerned. It is a commandment of love, genuine love, sincere love, a love that seeks the good and well being of others. Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"* (John 13:34).

Within the Lord's people there is a peace that passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). It is an inner peace. Philipians 4:7 does not say we'll be free from turmoil and trouble in the world. We cannot escape persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). What it means is, our hearts will not be consumed by the world's unrest and crisis. Though we live IN the world, we do not live AS the world. Maturity in Christ leaves the carnality of the world behind. Jesus spoke of peace (John 14:27), but not the kind of peace the world gives.

It is an inner peace that comforts our hearts. We live by a higher standard because his banner over us is love (cf. Song of Solomon 2:4).

Our devotion is to the Lord and His cause. While we are meek and gentle like our Lord, we will not compromise nor bend the Law of God. It

is the very principle that rules our hearts and lives. This is why Jesus teaches us to “...*fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matt. 10:28).

Is this so in your heart and life? Is

your life one of physical, carnal conflict or one of gentleness and peace? The judgment of the Lord is coming. Are you, will you, be ready? Will you meet Him in worldly confrontation and strife or in peace and love?

Unrest, Uprising, and Revolt...

(Continued from page 73)

to every good work.”

1 Thess. 4:11, “*And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*”

2 Thess. 3:12, “*Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*”

Rom. 13:13, “*Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy-ing.*”

1 Peter 2:11-17, “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*”

Here we see that our submission to the authority of government can make a difference to how men view Christianity. Our obedient, quiet, submissive lives can cause others to glorify God. The right attitude on our part can put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. On the other hand, if we engage in civil disobedience we will make Christianity look like a bunch of rebellious, lawless people.

PROTESTS AND PETITIONS FOR REDRESS OF WRONGS

In the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, number one in our “Bill of Rights,” our government allows its citizens “peaceably to assemble” and “to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” The point of this article is in no way intended to say the First Amendment is wrong.

Government of, by, and for the people demands that the people be involved. Christians are obligated as part of the government to try to steer that government in the right way. For this reason we should vote and use our votes as a stand for right and good, not swayed by party loyalty or the almighty pocketbook. It is not wrong to call attention to those things our government needs to change. It is not wrong to point out the things our government does that are wrong or sinful. It is not wrong to try to influence our government to do right. But there is a vast difference between peaceable assembly and violent protest. There is a vast difference between lawful attempts at responsible change and rebellion and revolution causing havoc and mayhem.

Christians are to be people of civil obedience. That is, we are commanded by God to obey the government under which we live. Anything less is sinful. The only exception to this rule is in the case where obedience to man’s law causes us to violate God’s law. The apostles made this clear in Acts 5:29 when they said, “*We ought to obey God rather than men.*” We have a higher calling. It is the Lord and His word. Heaven demands we seek God’s way first (Matt. 6:33).

THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY

John 18:36, “*Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should*

not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” It is important for us to remember that the power of Christianity is not military power. The kingdom of God is not advanced nor defended by bullets and bombs.

Christianity fights and conquers by reason, revelation — the Word of God (Rom. 1:16). “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:3-5). The power of Christianity is not from military action, not from civil government, not even from Christians. The power of Christianity is from God. God’s Word in all its power (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16) and the providential care of His people (1 Peter 3:12) are all the power we need in this world.

Christianity existed and flourished under the tyranny of Rome without Christians rising up and calling for the overthrow of Caesar. Many governments have persecuted Christians. That is simply the way it is. Second Timothy 3:12 says, “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” But the New Testament does not call Christians to overthrow governments. It calls us to submit to those governments, even those which are evil.

The command of the Lord is “...*that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*” (1 Tim. 2:2). We pray without ceasing that peace and safety may prevail. We pray that doors may be opened for the Gospel to be spread around the world. Are you helping the Lord’s cause or preventing it (cf. Matt. 12:30)?

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TAKING THE WORD OF GOD TO ISLAM #2

John Hall

ABOUT THE KORAN (QURAN)

The Koran was revealed in Arabic over a period of twenty-two years (AD 610-632). Since Muslims universally insist that Mohammed was illiterate, they claim that he received nonliterary (unwritten) revelations from the angel Gabriel, which he never wrote down (of course how could he if he was illiterate). The Koran supports this contention (6:7; 7:158; 17:93; 25:5; 29:48,51). This means the Koran existed first *only* orally as spoken by Mohammed. The next step, therefore, in preserving these “revelations” is to retrieve all these oral teachings from all the many hearers. Most of Islam will also admit and contend that this process of collecting and compiling all these “revelations” did not begin until after Mohammed’s death. This brings us to a *very important* point concerning the Koran. If Mohammed is indeed (as they claim) the final and greatest prophet, this necessitates that the retelling and recording of these “revelations” would be left to uninspired speakers, writers, and memories.

Muslim scholars and historians credit Abu Bakr (his best friend and father of his favorite wife) with having been the first to organize the collection and transmitting of all these “revelations” in one single book. They contend he produced the first official written Koran. Many Muslim apologists and scholars admit that after the initial compilation of the Koran was finished, many copies were burned. They will go on to explain, however, that this burning took place because there were “incorrect copies” and many with “mistakes”. They admit, therefore, that since their process of recording and collecting these “revelations” was a completely uninspired process, there were many mistakes and errors in early copies. Where most people contend that through the years a work will lose its credibility, the Muslims must contend that through the years their book gains more and more credibility as they remove the mistakes and contradictions.

It is often contended that when mistakes and contradictions arise, they are totally the fault of the translation of the text into another language other than Arabic. In the author’s personal experience, this has been a common response,

which is why in my work I always carried an Arabic copy of the Koran for Muslim students to use (though most of them could not use it if they wanted to!). By stating this, the person is basically saying the only way the Koran can be truly understood in its “perfect” and “inerrant” form is by speaking and/or reading the Arabic language. The god of the Koran has decided that the true message can only be received through one language, and the Koran claims in several passages that it has been preserved in only pure and clear Arabic speech (26:195). Interestingly enough, though, scattered throughout the pages of the Koran are words from *other languages!* For example, Syrian words are used repeatedly in the Koran (3:45- *masih* translated Messiah, 2:50- *furqan* translated salvation, etc.).

Finally, it is also important to understand what Muslims call Islamic *Hadith*. The *Hadith* is simply a collection of “traditions” regarding the life and sayings of the prophet Mohammed and how he responded to others. These traditions were first transmitted by word of mouth and later recorded. It is regarded as just as much the word of Allah as the Koran (some Muslims esteem it more authoritative even than the Koran).

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BOOKS LIKE THE KORAN

Where Jesus was *not* satisfied leaving the truth to the unaided human memories of His apostles alone, He instead told them the Holy Ghost would “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). The same cannot be said for the Koran. In recording the Bible, not only did God inspire the writer’s memory and knowledge, He also inspired their *writings*.

“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom *given unto him* hath written unto you” (2 Peter 3:15). “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the *things that I write* unto you are the *commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 14:37). “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, *Write*: for these *words are true* and faithful” (Rev. 21:5).

This is how Paul, through the Holy

Spirit, could write “*all Scripture* is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). All that is Scripture, whether oral or written, is God-breathed. That means if something new is taught, remembered, or written without the direct assistance of God, *it is not Scripture!*

That introduces another very important concept directly relating to the Koran. God breathed the words written by the apostle Paul when He wrote: “But though we, *or an angel from heaven*, preach any other gospel unto you than that which *we* have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9).

If the angel Gabriel brought a message to Mohammed (as they claim), that is different, contradictory, or even additional to what the apostles of Jesus Christ taught, **the message should be rejected!** Paul could not be any plainer than what he wrote to the Galatians. So, the man of God simply needs to compare the words of the Koran to the words of the apostles of Jesus Christ, and in *every single way* that the Koran is different than Scripture, it should be rejected and its author should be considered accursed. And, in whatever ways they agree, they are not true because the Koran said it (or in other words because Mohammed rewrote what he read in Scripture that had already been written), it is true because Scripture said it before Mohammed was even born!

Where the god of the Koran has decided that the true message can only be received through the Arabic language, this is in complete contrast to the God of the Bible who supplied many early Christians (specifically the apostles) with the ability to speak and carry the message in tongues they had never before studied (Acts 2:7-8, et al.) in order for the Gospel to reach all peoples (Col. 1:23). In fact, when God himself desired to speak a message to Saul of Tarsus, He spoke “in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 26:14). Paul wrote that there are “so many kinds of voices (or “languages” NKJV) in the world, and none of them is without signification (or “significance” NKJV)” (1 Cor. 14:10).

Part 2 of 4
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Elder's COLUMN

RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD ELDERS #2

Stephen Wiggins

In this series of articles, I am analyzing New Testament passages which set forth specific responsibilities the local congregation has toward elders. My objective remains twofold: 1) To help brethren understand exactly what God demands of his people as it pertains to the elders/congregation relationship. This objective will be attained by explaining what certain passages entail as to their meaning and application. 2) I want to encourage and motivate brethren to implement the attitudes and actions God solicits on our part toward elders. This objective may be attained by appealing to that sense of duty inherent within the hearts of honest and good brethren who are intent on pleasing their Master in all things spiritual. God's inspired directives relate how every member of the church should treat elders of the local congregation. Let us note a couple of these from a selected verse.

THE PASSAGE

The second passage in this series I would like to analyze comes from the book of Hebrews. The writer states: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them; for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account; that they may do this with joy, and not with grief; for this were unprofitable for you"* (Heb. 13:17; ASV).

The author references two classes of people in this verse. The reader gleanes this from usage of the second and third person plural pronouns: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them; for they watch in behalf of your souls..."* The second person pronouns ("you/your") references the ones being addressed by the writer. The author imposes upon this group certain responsibilities of obedience and submission. In contrast, the third person pronouns ("they/them") refer to those people being spoken about. The author states that this group "rules over" and "watches in behalf" of the first group. Who are these two classes?

The first group designates *Christians in general*. The second group denotes *the elders of various congregations*. Thus, the passage should be understood as addressing members of local congregations concerning responsibilities toward their elders.

Read it again: *"Obey them [the elders] that have the rule over you [the congregation], and submit to them [the elders]; for they [the elders] watch in behalf of your [the congregation] souls, as they [the elders] that shall give account; that they [the elders] may do this with joy, and not with grief; for this were unprofitable for you [the congregation]."* One may object that since Hebrews consists of a "general" epistle and does not address any specific congregational situation, this cannot equal a reference to the elders of the local church. Not so. Two matters should be considered: First, since elders were appointed "in every church" (Acts 14:23) during the first century, the authors of the so-called "generic" epistles take for granted that all the congregations of the Lord's people when fully organized possessed elders. For example, one writer mentions that if any among you are sick, let him call for "the elders of the church" (James 5:14). Another writer appeals to "the elders therefore among you" and even identifies himself as a "fellow-elder" (1 Peter 5:1-3). Neither of these epistles was addressed to a particular congregation of the Lord's people. Yet, both authors reference elders with the assumption that they generally existed in all churches of Christ. Second, the verse under discussion describes these leaders as *ruling* with oversight and *watching* out for the spiritual welfare of Christians. Elsewhere these concepts are descriptive of the work of overseers in contexts where "elders" and "bishops" are specified (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17). Further, reputable brethren have consistently applied Hebrews 13:17 to the elders/congregation relationship (McGarvey, 26; Woods, 141; Jackson, 21;

Duncan, 93; Taylor, 125)

OBEDIENCE

This passage sets forth two responsibilities that members of the local congregation have toward elders. The first obligation entails obedience: *"Obey them that have the rule over you..."* The word translated "obey" carries the basic meaning *to persuade or be persuaded*. In this context, however, the word conveys the nuance, *to listen, to obey, to yield, to comply with, or to follow* (Thayer, 497; BDAG, 792). Paul uses the term in this sense when referencing one's appropriate response to God's truth: *"Ye were running well; who hindered you that ye should not obey the truth"* (Gal. 5:7)? When one obeys God, they yield their will to the Lord's will; they comply with what God demands and remain faithful in practice to his requirements. In this same sense, every member of the church must surrender their volition to the collective will and wisdom of elders who oversee the local congregation. Show me a *faithful* Christian and I will point to the same individual as a person who *obeys* the directives of the elders of the local church. That person will do so because they know such compliance remains part of what God expects and demands among the devoted. Faithful Christians never rebel at God's word but rather live in harmony with that divine will. If God says members of the church are to obey elders, then the faithful Christian feels privileged to oblige.

SUBMISSION

The second responsibility members of the local congregation have toward elders entails submission: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them..."* The term translated "submit" occurs only here in the New Testament. The word relates the concept, "withdraw, give way to." The meaning here, however, has a figurative extension, "to yield to someone's authority," *yield, give way, submit* as when one sur-

renders to the orders or directives of another (BDAG, 1030; Louw/Nida, 468). The idea conveys that members of the congregation are to respond with submission to the *authoritative* directives of the elders even when one feels at variance with their decisions (Allen, 624). Some of the newer versions correctly reflect this meaning in their translation of the passage with the rendering: “submit to their authority” [NIV, TNIV; (Note: I quote from these translations for illustrative purposes only to demonstrate how current scholarship reflects the biblical truth that elders possess delegated authority. This authoritative concept inheres within the very terminology of inspiration’s original wording. Our more liberal-minded brethren are loath to acknowledge this gem of truth as such has been a controversial issue with them for years. They have long denied that elders possess any authority whatsoever as it pertains to their decision making role. If liberals would have taken time to study the very words of the New Testament as reflected in their own cherished versions, however, they would have known better to controvert over a matter the original makes crystal clear — *the authority of elders*. My quotation from this one verse offers no blanket endorsement of the translations cited)]. The point is that *submit* in this passage means to *surrender to the authoritative* directives of the elders (Lane, 554).

IMPERATIVES

The English reader may sometimes fail to appreciate that when the first century authors wrote the New Testament, they had at their disposal a language which allows for great flexibility of expression. Greek permits an exactness or specificity which, though apparent to the original readers of the New Testament, rarely transfers to the target language in the translation process. This concession does *not* affirm that the truth of God’s word cannot be conveyed through translation. The observation merely acknowledges that there are intricacies such as subtle nuances of meaning, syntactical constructions, and grammatical forms which are sometimes exegetically significant for the interpreter but not usually conveyed in translation with the vividness otherwise noted from the original language. The conventions of the English language will not allow for the transference of some things clear to a reader of

the Greek New Testament. For example, observe that the author formulates both verbs, *obey* and *submit*, in the imperative mood on a present tense stem. The significance of this may go unappreciated unless brought to one’s attention that there are reasons *why* the author makes the grammatical choices he does (Porter, 50).

By using an imperative, the author issues a clear, positive command. It makes a direct demand to the human will or *volition* (Wallace, 446). It involves the imposition of one’s will upon another. This explains why one grammarian calls the imperative the “mood of volition” (Dana/Mantey, 174). The imperative expresses the author’s attempt to impose God’s will on the church as a directive to be obeyed. First century readers would have immediately noticed the force of this grammatical construction and understood the seriousness and urgency of the charge. The significance of this should be underscored for modern day readers. When inspiration dictates Christians to *obey* and *submit* to their overseers, a strong mandate comes through loud and clear. God has spoken in forceful language. No option or choice in the matter remains for those who wish to be counted among the faithful. One might as well refuse to obey the command to be baptized as to fail to obey the command to submit to one’s elders. This authoritative injunction must be obeyed or else rebellion to the divine will ensues. Insubordination equals the heinous crime of anarchy.

When used for commands, the *present* tense imperative denotes an ongoing action (Dana/Mantey, 300). This usage classifies as a “customary” present. The force of which conveys a continuous action that may or may not have already commenced (Wallace, 485, 721-722). What must be appreciated is that Greek *tense* does not relate the *time* of the verbal action, so much as it portrays the *kind of action*. Here, for example, embedded in the verb tense-form, coupled with the literary context of the passage, the grammatical construction relates an ongoing activity. That is, the author wants to portray the *type of action* as progressive in nature. The writer had other tense options available by which he could have portrayed a different kind of action. But he made the deliberate choice to use the *present* tense. The author’s grammatical choice would have been immediate-

ly recognized by first century readers. That significance remains the same for us today — the directives to *submit* and *obey* are not obligations which can be discharged with a one time or even sporadic effort. Such commands can only be obeyed through constant and habitual practice. It involves an obligation imposed on the brethren that will always and forever remain a God-given duty. It equals a continuous responsibility.

There will never be a time this side of eternity when God’s people will be exempt from their responsibilities of obedience and submission toward elders in the church. These grammatical nuances are captured, in part, by the following expanded translation: I command you to continuously obey the elders who rule over you. I command you to continuously submit to their authority.

EXCEPTIONS

No one suggests that elders are infallible or incapable of sin. No one maintains that elders are immune to becoming disqualified through some moral failure or doctrinal aberration. No one suggests that elders cannot abuse their authoritative role resulting in “lording it over” God’s people as oppressive dictators (1 Peter 5:3). No one argues here for indiscriminate loyalty toward overseers without regard for exceptional situations. No one denies there may be extenuating circumstances where the divine mandate to obey and submit to shepherds cannot be followed by a faithful flock.

As human beings, elders are susceptible to spiritual failures in the same way any child of God may succumb to temptations — preachers, deacons, or members in general. Elders must first “take heed” to themselves before they can do so to the flock (Acts 20:28). Even the “spiritual” who seek to restore the “erring” must continuously be “looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). The possibility exists that elders can apostatize either doctrinally or ethically (Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 5:17-20). If the elect continue in submission to such wayward men, the probability exists that they will be led to their spiritual ruin as well. Therefore it may be safely assumed that when the biblical author orders God’s people to *obey* and *submit* to elders that he has in mind *faithful* elders/leaders, not apostate renegades.

By virtue of the fact that elders may apostatize from the faith, there are exceptions to the general rule of obedience and submission toward elders. But one must not attempt to negate what God demands regarding the Christian's responsibilities toward faithful elders by operating on the "exception" principle and not the "general rule." Such delusional efforts characterize only those who despise God's design for elders to rule over a congregation. Know that the divine mandates pertaining to submission must be understood and obeyed within the overall framework of the biblical context.

God does not enjoin upon the saints blind allegiance to any man, much less to elders who are not leading within the perimeters of truth and righteousness (Acts 5:29). What must be appreciated is that elders occupy a functional role within the church that exists by divine design. It is in connection with this role and overall design that God designates elders to serve loyally and faithfully as shepherds over his people. When they do this in accordance with God's will, then there *must* be dedicated obedience and submission to the elders of the local congregation. No exceptions allowed.

DISAGREEMENTS

One may agree with what the Bible teaches on congregational autonomy and on members being obedient and submissive to elders; yet, they find themselves disagreeing with the elders pertaining to decisions they make on behalf of the congregation. If one does not exercise prudence in this regard they may allow tension to escalate resulting in resentment along with a hypercritical disposition toward their elders. Such can easily denigrate into a lack of respect for the elders if not outright insubordination. I have personally witnessed this tragedy on more than one occasion during my ministry. This is sad because an otherwise dedicated Christian finds himself not only refusing to work in harmony with the elders but even despising that he must subordinate himself to leadership he views as incompetent. If a person finds themselves in this situation it may help to consider a couple of practical suggestions.

First, just because one disagrees with a decision made by the elders does not mean the elders are wrong. It does not mean they have sinned. It does not mean they have violated some scriptur-

al principle of truth. It simply means that their judgment differs from yours resulting in a different course of action. Every decision elders make falls into the realm of expedience. They do not legislate for God. They do not make laws for God. Their decision making role remains within the realm of judgment and practicality as they oversee and make judicial choices on behalf of the spiritual welfare of a congregation. Many times an "eldership" will not even unanimously agree among themselves. It follows that just because disagreements arise on how to carry out a particular aspect of the Lord's work does not mean anyone's actions should be viewed as right versus wrong. The elders have not committed a crime just because their judgment differs from yours. Therefore any disagreements dealing with the functional and procedural role of elders should be viewed as a difference of *discretion in judgment* and not in matters of transgressing God's will. Think also in terms that obedience and submission to elders does not necessarily demand a rubber stamp endorsement of every decision made by them. In other words, there can be room for respectful disagreements in matters of judgment without rebelling against their leadership.

Second, if one disagrees with the elders, you might consider the fact that their collective wisdom and experience makes them far more qualified to make decisions on behalf of the church than you as an individual. It is possible that because of their accumulative knowledge they actually know much more than you do concerning the circumstances surrounding their decision on a particular matter. It also may be the case that they know details about a situation of which you as a member of the congregation are not privy and that this knowledge assisted them in coming to the conclusion they did. Perhaps one could also think in terms of exemplifying an element of trust in those men that the congregation appointed as qualified overseers. Cultivate an appreciation for their discretion and wisdom. Instead of being disagreeable and hypersensitive to your own opinions, assume that the elders are making the best choices possible based on the information they have at their disposal. Perhaps there could be more humility on the part of some members who think they could do a better job than the current elders. Our twenty-first century

North American culture prides itself on individualism and self-reliance. This mentality fuels the freedom we suppose is ours to be hypercritical toward leaders in general. It remains easier for these folks to criticize and complain than to help with solutions to problems. Don't be so naïve as to think that if you were an elder, everyone would always agree with you in every decision made. That will never happen.

For a list of Sources in writing this article, see: seektheoldpaths.com/stop-011.htm#SOUR

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

be willing to come our way for perhaps a year or so and help us start a church and educate us on the correct way to do everything and the best way to start? Thank you for your help. Warm regards”

...Chuck and Nancy Verkist, Ellensburg, WA. [NOTE: Though I have never met brother and sister Verkist, I have corresponded with them for many years. They use our videos and newspaper articles to assist them in their worship and teaching. If any of our readers may be able to assist them in their endeavor to have someone come and work with them in establishing a faithful church in Washington state, then please contact them. Their address is: **906 E 2nd Ave., Ellensburg, WA 98926, cverkist@kvalley.com.** This Christian couple is certainly worthy of our support. We would like to ask all the sound brethren and congregations in the surrounding states of the west and northwest to write them an email of encouragement. —editor]. “Brother Robinson, thank you so much for your stand for the truth. I enjoy *Seek The Old Paths* very much. May God bless you and the elders and all concerned with this wonderful work. Please keep printing this”

...Bobbi Wheeler, Baxter, TN. “Will you please add my name to your mailing list? I have read several articles online and I would like to get the written copies. My husband and I pick up the issues when we visit a congregation in Murfreesboro, TN. We enjoy reading STOP”

...Katherine Byrom, Manchester, TN. “Please remove my mother, Mildred Phillips, from your mailing list for *Seek The Old Paths*. She passed away in 2009 and we are already receiving your publication in our name at the same address”

...Mrs. Mark Stephens, New Market, AL. “My mother, Eleanor Edmonds, has received the subject publication for years. She had enjoyed it, but no longer wishes to receive it and hated to have you pay postage for it any longer. Please remove her name and address from the mailing list for *Seek the Old Paths* publication. Thank you and God bless”

...Lisa Davis, Harriman, TN. “Please remove from mailing list”

...Janice Thaxton, McMinnville, TN. “Please send me the monthly publication of *Seek The Old Paths*. 86 years old but still seeking the truth. Thank you again”

...Raymond Christmas, Marshall, TX. “Brother Garland, the sound Gospel articles presented in *Seek The Old Paths* are truly a joy to read. It is very encouraging to me to stay faithful to The Word. It is uplifting to read the MAILBAG and realize there are other Christians remaining faithful to Christ. I have heard that in many areas The Church is erring from the truth. My eyes were certainly opened to his disregard of God’s plan of worship by some of our brethren while site-seeing with family in Oregon last fall. (Should we really call them brethren?) In shock at the band playing when I walked into the foyer of one so-called Church of Christ (at least the sign out front said it was), I went to the truck and cried thinking how very sad it must make Christ who shed His blood for us. Unfortunately, my cousin did not agree to leave with me. She did take me to a congregation near her home that evening for worship. May we continue to pray that the once faithful Christians repent before it is too late and that we do not succumb to their false teaching. Please do not include my name in STOP”

...West of the Mississippi. “Please remove from your mailing list. Thank you”

...Stephanie Styers, Selmer, TN. “Please send me your free monthly publication, *Seek The Old Paths*. I’m a prisoner at the Huntsville, Texas Estelle Unit. Thank you very much and may God bless you all there”

...Eric Bricker, Huntsville, TX. “Dear brothers, Recently I have been reading all of your articles on the internet so you can delete my name and address from your mailing and save a little postage. Keep up the good work, ‘til the Midnight Cry,”

...Billy

“We cannot seem to locate or perhaps we don’t have the ability to locate a sound church with which to worship, fellowship and work. There does not seem to be any in three states. We are not sure where to try next. Would there be an avenue where we might be able to find a preacher who would

Grammer, Longview, TX. “Enclosed you will find a contribution that you may use to help repair the ink drum or to help with other expenses. With issues of permissive society today, we draw comfort from your publication of *Seek The Old Paths*. We gain strength knowing that there are others out there who seek the *Old Paths*. It is with your monthly publication the truth is being told, for this we thank you and those who write the articles. I would greatly appreciate it if you would add the following on your monthly mailing”

...Art Ostrander, Marshall, TX. “I am interested in receiving your magazine, *Seek The Old Paths*. If there is a charge, could you please add me to the mailing list? If there is a subscription charge, could you please send me subscription info and a sample copy of the magazine? Thank you for your time and assistance. I hope to hear from you soon”

...Jim Kenison, Concord, NH. [NOTE: There is no charge. We’re glad to add anyone to our mailing list. The paper is supported by free-will contributions of churches and individuals. We’re glad to help. —editor]. “Dear brother Robinson; To all who are in McMinnville, Tennessee, East End Church of Christ, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7). It has always brightened my spirit to use the beautiful language of the Bible, and the inspired men who recorded it is sweet to greet a faithful brother in a like manner. It has been quite some time since I had opportunity to greet you personally and hear you teach; but my subscription to *Seek The Old Paths* has kept that remembrance fresh. I would ask you to receive and know of the fervent prayers of both myself and my wife for your work in the Lord. Lastly, please add my dear friend in Christ to your subscription list. He too is a faithful minister of the word of God”

...Peter and Martha Capocchia, Southbridge, MA.

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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