

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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ELDERS, WATCH!

Roger D. Campbell

As the apostle Paul was heading toward Jerusalem near the end of his third recorded preaching journey, he and those with him stopped on the island of Miletus (Acts 20:16). From there *"he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church"* (20:17). When those elders came to Paul (20:18), he reminded them of his past activities with them.

After that, Paul turned those elders' attention to a pressing matter: their responsibility as shepherds/leaders of the church. In Acts 20:28-35, among other things, we read that the inspired apostle told them,

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. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. ... I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the

words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

These words offered to the overseers of the church in Ephesus served as a charge, exhortation, and warning to them. Members of the Lord's body need to be aware of what God desires and expects from the shepherds of a local church. In particular, every elder of every congregation should give special attention to the above-quoted words that Paul spoke to those brothers in the Christ that had the responsibility of shepherding the flock of God nearly 2,000 years ago.

Acts 20:31 shows that God charges all elders to "watch." The word "watch" is from the Greek word *gregoreo*. Metaphorically, it means "to watch, i.e., give strict attention to, be cautious, active" [Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p.122, word no. 1127]. That same Greek word is translated as "be vigilant" in I Peter 5:8, where it is written, *"Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* Whatever all Christians are supposed to do in their dealings with Satan — "be vigilant," that is exactly what all elders are to do in their work of overseeing God's church — "be vigilant," "watch." It is serious business, indeed, for it is the difference between spiritual life and death!

In the context of Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders, what are those

things and people for which the elders must watch? Let us consider three answers from the text.

1) Elders, Watch Yourselves!

We see this idea in the very first words of verse 28: *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves..."* For those elders that sincerely desire to be able to lead others effectively, the first step is for them to set forth in their own lives the kind of example that other members of the church can respect and imitate. Every overseer is to be "of good behavior" (I Tim. 3:2). Yes, as I Peter 5:3 indicates, elders are to be "examples to the flock." They are, of course, to be good examples!

Every child of God is commanded, *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves"* (II Cor. 13:5). We are also told to take heed lest we fall (I Cor. 10:12). Such instructions surely apply to all elders. Being appointed as the spiritual leaders over a local flock of God may cause some to be lifted up with pride. Elders, beware! Serving as elders may cause some to feel that they are "above the law" of God and no longer subject to it. Elders, beware! Being appointed to oversee the work of a congregation may cause some brothers to want to become Diotrephes-styled dictators, lording it over the flock (III John 9,10; I Peter 5:3). Elders, beware!

Elders, watch yourselves. You can be sure that other members of the church, as well as those outside the body of the Christ, will be closely observing your walk and talk. It just "comes with the territory." Elders, we

need you brothers in the Lord to help show us the way by the pattern of life you set before us. But that is not all.

2) Elders, Watch the Flock!

The charge of Acts 20:28 is not simply for elders to watch themselves, but also to take heed “to all the flock.” The flock is “the church of God” (Acts 20:28). It is called “the flock of God” (I Peter 5:2). It is not just a flock. It is God’s flock! And some brothers in the Lord are responsible for watching after His flock. Who might that be? Those the Bible calls “elders” (Acts 20:17) or “overseers” (Acts 20:28). There is no greater responsibility in all the world than the responsibility that rests on the shoulders of elders.

What does God want elders to do? Take heed to all the flock. That involves acting as its overseers (Acts 20:28). The word “overseer” is from the Greek word *episkopos* which is defined as “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent” [Thayer’s, p.243, word no. 1985]. So, these men are not just given the title “overseers,” but rather really taking charge and act as those that have the duty of making sure that only the right things are done, and that the right things are done in the right way by the right people. The Bible’s teaching is clear: God has given the oversight of a local church to those brothers that serve as elders (I Peter 5:1,2). It is one thing to have brothers’ names listed on the church bulletin or letterhead as “elders.” It is another thing entirely for them to step up, step out, and really do the work of organizing, planning, and leading a congregation in carrying out the Lord’s work.

What else do we learn from Acts 20:28 about the elders’ watch of the flock? They are to see to the flock’s spiritual needs by feeding it. The NKJV says that the elders are “to shepherd” the church. The same thought is noted in I Peter 5:1,2, where elders are charged, “Feed,” “tend,” “shepherd” the flock of God which is among you. In both verses (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2), the verb “feed/shepherd/tend” is from the Greek word *poimaino* which means “to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep ... to rule, govern ... to furnish pasturage of food; to nourish” [Thayer’s,

p.527, word no. 4165]. Vine’s states that the Greek word for “feed” means “to act as a shepherd (from *poimen*, a shepherd). Here is a significant point: according to Acts 20:28, who (which people) are to shepherd the church? Answer: its overseers who are called “elders” (20:17). But the word “shepherds” is also translated as “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11. Thus, biblically speaking, in God’s plan, true shepherds or pastors are the same as elders. Pastors are elders, and elders are pastors. The different Bible terms have reference to the same people.

How are the elders to feed or shepherd the flock? In part, by providing for it the spiritual nutrition that it needs. How does that come about? By giving it the proper teaching — the word of God that causes the sheep to grow and continue to be strong (I Peter 2:2). The elders are responsible for all teaching that is done in a congregation. That does not mean that the elders personally have to teach every class or preach every sermon. But, since they must give account for the souls of those whom they oversee (Heb. 13:17), they ultimately are responsible for every handout or booklet used in a class, every bulletin published, and every sermon preached. If any errors are propagated in any of these forums, then the elders are responsible for taking the proper action to correct such errors. Why? Because they are to make sure that the sheep under their shepherdship don’t get any poisonous food!

Note that the message of Acts 20:28 is for elders to take heed to “all” the flock which they oversee. Not one sheep is to be left out. Later Paul went on to tell the Ephesian elders to “support the weak” (Acts 20:35). Every sheep in the flock, including the weak ones, is deserving of the shepherds’ concern, care, and if needed, correction. Jesus said that the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11). Which ones? Which ever sheep need the protection. Remember Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep? A shepherd with one hundred sheep loses one sheep. If the shepherd really cares for the sheep, what does he do? He goes after that which is lost until he finds it (Luke 15:4). Elders need to take heed to the spiritual needs of the entire flock.

That sounds like a job that carries a lot of responsibility, that requires a lot of work, that surely would have to be supported by constant prayer by the shepherds, and that could make the difference in some of the sheep ultimately being lost or being saved. Right on every point: being shepherds that really watch for the flock is not a task for boys or those that are unwilling to carry out their God-given duty.

3) Elders, Watch the Wolves!

Paul warned the elders from Ephesus about wolves: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). Elders are charged with keeping the wolves out of and away from God’s flock. Brethren, it is not wise, and it is not loving, to ignore spiritual wolves. Wolves “draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Spiritual wolves destroy God’s sheep!

False prophets are wolves (Matt. 7:15). Those that are trying to convince the church to fellowship denominations are wolves. Those that encourage our young people to disregard the New Testament’s pattern for worship are wolves. Those that advocate that people can marry and divorce as often as they want, for any reason they want, and still be in good standing with God, are wolves. Elders, beware!

The church of Christ suffers greatly at the hands of wolves. Some of the damage could be limited if elders would be more aware of and forearmed against spiritual wolves. Elders need to take time to read and learn about the wolves of our day, their teaching, their practices and their manners. You see, the wolves that are today in our midst just down the road, in the next county, or next state, may try to get into our flock tomorrow. If we are concerned about and watch approaching bad weather or physical diseases, then surely it is a whole lot more important to beware of and track spiritual wolves.

Elders, watch! Watch yourselves, watch the flock, and watch the wolves. God commands you to, and those of us under your care and oversight need you to.

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PREPARING OUR FUTURE ELDERS

Jeremy Morris

Paul began his letter to Titus with two specific instructions for his work with the congregations of Crete. Titus should, “*set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city*” (Titus 1:5). Before all other words of admonition and edification, Paul reminded Titus that the individual flocks of the Lord’s heritage must have their needs met and qualified men placed over them as shepherds and overseers.

Today, two millennia removed from Titus, the message from the Holy Spirit has not changed. Congregations throughout the brotherhood need to set themselves in order and appoint elders to oversee the church. Because the former depends solely on the uniqueness of each congregation, only a case-by-case discussion could determine what each congregation lacks. Yet, even a cursory survey of the church today clearly reveals an area of want — scripturally qualified elders.

Unlike many of our other needs, if a congregation lacks elders, filling this void cannot occur overnight. Like a strong oak tree, men require time and experience before they can grasp the shepherd’s staff and feed the flock of God which is among them. Because the Lord, through his wisdom, saw it proper for congregations to possess a plurality of elders, those congregations lacking elders must patiently wait for two or more men to rise up to the work of an elder. A lack of such patience has led to many unwise and hasty appointments of men unprepared or unqualified for such a task.

The process of preparing our future elders starts neither with the middle-aged nor those early in their marriage. We need to start grooming our young men if our drought of elders will end. Our young men must constantly hear the importance of doctrinal purity, seeking the old paths, and spreading the Gospel. At the same time, we ought to also encourage these same men to be like Ezra because he, “*prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do*

it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).

Some young men, through various means, will rise like cream to the top and naturally assume roles of leadership. Like Timothy, whom Paul found at Lystra well reported of the brethren and obviously ready for spiritual work, these young men demand our attention. Elders and evangelists of their home congregations ought to take hold of these brethren and direct them as their lives progress — directing them towards the path of elders. Perhaps we too hastily encourage men to “leave the nest” and become evangelists when we see them increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. The church needs elders just as badly as it needs evangelists, perhaps even more so.

Local congregations must diligently prod the growing saints to prepare for future eldership roles. We must instill in our young men a sense of duty to meet the needs of the church, if capable. Looking to Isaiah, we see the spirit of duty exemplified. When the Lord asks, “*Whom shall I send,*” Isaiah stepped forward and answered, “*Here am I, send me*” (Isaiah 6:8). Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah and Amos, all saw themselves unfit to serve the Lord; yet, God encouraged and groomed these men into leaders so they could fulfill his purposes. A young man must understand the sense of duty to serve God as an elder or a deacon or an evangelist trumps personal inhibitions.

In either circumstance, it behooves the local congregation to seek and prepare young men to fill in the future leadership needs in the kingdom of God. We ought to remind our young men of the perils of life which may disqualify them as future shepherds. Young men need to realize the folly of “sowing wild oats” can set down the framework for an unqualified life. Instead, the seeds of a saintly character must reach the young man’s heart. Habits in the youth will produce men vigilant, sober, of good behavior, peaceable, patient, and the like. Righting the

ship of man comes much easier in the pliable youth than in the firm and stubborn old age.

Certain qualifications might require more emphasis on our part due to the prevalent lack of these qualities among brethren of “appointable age.” The church must not repeat the mistakes of the present and continue in this drought of spiritual leadership.

We must emphasize the importance of a strong, godly marriage. All across the brotherhood our young men have entered into foolish and spiritually disastrous unions. A poor decision in a wife, or a destructive affair in his youth, may inhibit a man from being an elder if his past includes a shameful divorce. “The husband of one wife” would not be such a contentious qualification if our young men married right the first time.

Like Judah in the days of Jeremiah, covetousness thrives in American society and the youth often heed its deceptive Siren Song. We must teach, and exemplify, the beautiful words of Hebrews 13:5-6. “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*” Seeds of covetousness find the soft soil of a young man’s heart and cause him to become the forbidden “lover of money.” A man who never learned to depend on the Lord in temporal affairs can hardly learn to depend on the Lord when overseeing the church.

More subtle, but extremely detrimental to the church, is an inability to teach and exhort. Entire generations of men have gone their entire lives away from teaching and instruction. When congregations look to them to pick up the shepherd’s staff, their shortcomings in being “apt to teach” and “able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince

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Preparing Elders...

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST A DISTINCTIVE PLEA

Aaron M. M. Purvis

Most of the “Christian” world today is characterized by being either “Catholic” or “Protestant.” For many, consequently, it is seemingly impossible for one to profess neither of the two, and yet still be a “Christian.” People have become so accustomed to thinking of Christianity in terms of “Catholicism” and “Protestantism” that it has probably never occurred to them that one can be a Christian without being either of the two. However, God-fearing folk who comprise the churches of Christ have for years been endeavoring to manifest a message of distinction from this and many other common denominational sentiments: viz., that not only is it possible to be neither Catholic nor Protestant — and still be a “Christian” — but that there are actually millions of “Christians only” in this nation, and in nations around the world, who belong to no denomination in religion. Indeed, you can be just a Christian without being a part of any denomination.

WHO ARE THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST?

Churches of Christ are autonomous congregations of Christians who are striving simply to restore Christianity as it is revealed in the New Testament. The term “church of Christ” is not used in a sectarian sense, but is intended to denote our desire to belong to Christ, and be members of His church, which He said He would build (cf. Matt. 16:18). The New Testament teaches that the church to which all Christians are added (Acts 2:47) belongs to Christ. In Ephesians 5:23 we learn that “*Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body.*” Paul, in his letter to Christians worshipping in Rome, said “*The churches of Christ salute you*” (Rom. 16:16). It must be understood that this title is not used as a proper name, but is instead a descriptive expression which shows how the church relates to Christ. It is Christ’s body, Christ’s church; and does not belong to, nor wear the name of any other (man or

otherwise) (see also I Cor. 12:27; Heb. 12:23; Acts 4:12). As aforementioned, members of the church of Christ are like the disciples of Christ in the first century, known as “Christians” (Acts 11:26), “children of God” (Gal. 3:26), or “a Christian” (Acts 26:28; I Peter 4:16), nothing more, nothing less (cf. Acts 4:12). Never does a human name prefix this God-given distinction and, in fact, abiding by humanly derived designations in religion is condemned by the Scriptures (cf. I Cor. 1:10-17).

A DISTINCTIVE CREED

Most of the religious world binds upon their adherents their own respective Creeds or Statements of Faith. However, the church of Christ has no humanly contrived creed. Church manuals, Disciplines, and all Articles of Faith created by uninspired men are rejected, and the sole standard of authority in religion by which men are to walk is the Word of God (Matt. 4:4).

The Bible is the inspired Word of God (II Peter 1:21; I Cor. 2:13; I Thess. 2:13). It contains “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Peter 1:3) and makes men completely “furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16-17). There is no need to bind anything other than God’s Word in order to serve God faithfully. The creeds and catechisms of Protestantism and Catholicism are barriers to unity rather than bastions for it. If the creed contains anything less than what the Bible teaches, it contains too little. If it contains anything more than what the Bible teaches, it contains too much. And if it contains everything the Bible teaches, it is, in truth, superfluous, for the Bible alone will suffice.

DISTINCTIVE IN ORGANIZATION

Following the pattern of organization in the New Testament, churches of Christ are autonomous. In New Testament times, each individual congregation, consisting of elders, deacons, and saints (Phil.

1:1), made their decisions in matters of faith and practice, according to “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) and by the authority of, or “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17; Matt. 28:18-20). The jurisdiction of elders did not extend beyond their home congregation. Today, similarly, churches of Christ do not wait upon a central headquarters, uninspired councils, conferences, or synods to dictate what to believe and do and what not to believe and do. Modern ecclesiastical machinery finds no support in the New Testament and rests upon the doctrines and precepts of men, which Christ describes as being “vain” religion (Matt. 15:1-9).

DISTINCTIVE IN WORSHIP

Members of the church of Christ today worship the Lord in the same manner in which it did in the “Apostolic Era” — or first century. Hence, by merely looking to the writings of the Apostles and prophets of the first century (i.e. the Bible), one will discover the nature of pristine Christian worship as employed by sound churches of Christ today. Investigating the Scriptures, one will find that the worship of the church consisted of *singing* (Col. 3:16-17), *prayers* (Acts 2:42), *teaching* (Acts 2:42; 20:7), the *Lord’s Supper* (Acts 20:7), and the *contributions* of individual Christians on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2). Nothing more than this has been Divinely authorized, and thus to innovate and add unto any of these is essentially to walk by your own authority and to presumptuously sin (Gal. 1:6-9; Mark 7:6-8). Such sins lead to spiritual death (cf. Prov. 16:25; Rom. 6:23).

A FINAL DISTINCTIVE PLEA

In a divided religious world, our distinctive plea is based upon the religious unity for which Christ prayed in John 17 by submitting to God’s Word. We entreat all people to abandon all of the dark ages of corruption, discarding humanly instituted names, creeds, and practices,

and to forsake all obstacles that divide men, and to be members of the Lord's church. Why is such important? Because the Lord has always called for a restoration to His "old paths" (Jer. 6:16) when digression occurs. He warns us not to go beyond what is written (II John 9; I Cor. 4:6), nor to "pervert the gospel of Christ" lest we be "accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).

Indeed, God does not tolerate human innovations in religion for "*it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jer. 10:23).

We therefore encourage all to allow the Scriptures alone to be their guide in religion — to accept the evidence which confirms that the God of the Bible exists, that Jesus Christ is His Divine Son, that the Bible is His

"perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25), being both absolute and comprehensible in nature, and to be added to Christ's church (Acts 2:47) by submitting to heaven's terms of salvation (cf. Heb. 11:6; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 2:38). We request your solemn contemplation upon this plea.

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THE MOST INCLUSIVE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Lloyd Gale

It is the church that one may read about in the last will and testament of the Son of God.

Well, please tell me what church you are speaking about. It is the church that was in the mind of God from the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:10-11). It is the church that the Old Testament prophets foresaw (Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-2). It is the church that the Son of God promised he would build and the one he did build (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:1-47; Eph. 2:19-22). It is the church that is built upon the bedrock truth expressed by the Apostle Peter that Jesus is the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16). It is the church that was purchased with the blood of the Lamb of God (Acts 20:28).

It is the church that was opposed by Satan and his followers from its beginning (Job 1:7; Matt. 13:33-43; John 8:44). It is the church that was opposed and persecuted by powerful religious leaders and by the chief of sinners (Matt. 23:1-39; 15:13; I Tim. 1:15). It is the church that has been despised and ridiculed from its inception (Acts 8:1-3). It is the church that has been scorned by the blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 15:13-14).

But it is the church, the kingdom, the prophets saw being established during the time of the Roman kingdom in Jerusalem (Daniel 2:44). They said that it would spread throughout the world and it did (Acts 1:8; 8:4).

The founder of that church sent His Ambassadors throughout the world to establish congregations and they did so in their lifetime (Col. 1:23). It is the church that invites one and all to come and be one in Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 11:28-30). It is the church where no one is required to submit to the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:8-9; I Tim. 1:3). It is the church that is the bride of Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:2,9). It is the church that is faithful to the bridegroom and to none other (John 10:27). It is the only church authorized and approved by the Creator (Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23; 5:23).

It is the church that worships God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The church that honors his instructions and not the will of man (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-8). It is the church that adds nothing or takes away anything from God's word (Rev. 22:18-19). It is the church that pleads for the unity of all professed believers by following the instructions of its head (I Cor. 1:10; John 17:20-21). It is the church that one may read about in the last will and testament of the Son of God (especially the book of Acts). It is the church that no one will be excluded from unless they exclude themselves (Acts 10:34-35).

It is the church that was foreshadowed by Noah and the ark.

God instructed Noah to build but one ark and it was to have but one door. All who would be saved must enter that one ark by the one door or perish. There may have been other ships built by the people of the antediluvian world that they thought would save them but they could not survive the chaos. Jesus said; "*I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*" (John 10:9). Again Jesus said; "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me*" (John 14:6). The Lord and His church would include every person on earth, but sadly, men exclude themselves. How about you?

And wouldn't you know that Satan and his agents have deceived multitudes into falsely believing that the Lord's church is too exclusive. Just the opposite of the truth. But Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free*" (John 8:32). Did not our Lord in fact invite all to come to Him? And, isn't it true that both the bride (which is the Lord's church) and the Spirit say, "Come"? And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

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CLAPPING OF HANDS

Rusty Stark

Is the clapping of hands ever acceptable in a spiritual setting, or in response to spiritual things? In order to deal with the various facets of this question, we must first define what we mean by clapping the hands. Then we can deal with “if and when” the practice would ever be acceptable in connection with spiritual things.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CLAPPING?

There are two different things that both come under the heading of clapping. 1) We can clap our hands in rhythm or to the beat of music. 2) We can clap our hands in applause.

CLAPPING AS MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Clapping as an element of music, done to the beat or rhythm of a song is not acceptable to God when it accompanies a spiritual song. It is never appropriate in private or in public worship, formal or informal assemblies, to sing praises to God accompanied by the clapping of hands, because it is not authorized (Col. 3:17).

Why? For the same reasons that instrumental music is not an acceptable accompaniment for spiritual songs. Clapping is instrumental music. The instrument is the hands. Since God only authorizes vocal music, singing words that can teach and edify (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), no other instruments are acceptable to him (see also Leviticus 10:1-3).

CLAPPING AS APPLAUSE

Applause is an ambiguous thing. It does not have the same meaning in every setting. Clapping had various meanings in the Bible.

1. Spitefulness and derision. In Job 27:23; 34:37; Lamentations 2:15; Ezekiel 25:6; and Nahum 3:19, clapping hands has the meaning of spite and derision toward a defeated enemy or toward someone who has been cast down.
2. Joy. In Psalm 98:8 and Isaiah 55:12 applause was an expression of joy, but without the emphasis on spitefulness toward

a defeated enemy. Note: in these two passages, it is not man doing the clapping, but the personification of floods and trees. II Kings 11:2 was also a time of clapping. It accompanied the setting up of Joash as king, and seemed to be a time of rejoicing.

3. Psalm 47:1 may be a combination of both of these ideas. Clapping here is an expression of joy. But it is joy over a fallen enemy, and therefore may also express spite toward that fallen enemy.

Clapping also has various meaning in our society.

1. Applause is done to harass and distract. This is done often at sporting events when the opposing team is about to attempt a free throw or a field goal.
2. Applause is praise to a performer. Whether it is an athlete for some physical feat, a singer, an actor/actress, or even someone making a presentation or speech.
3. Applause is respect to a person. People applaud our President. Even those on the other side of the aisle feel a need to give respectful applause during the State of the Union address.
4. Similarly, applause can also express agreement or endorsement of what someone has said during a speech or what he has done. We may applaud a candidate who promises to lower taxes, or we may applaud a man who wins a prize or saves a child from a burning building.
5. Applause represents celebration and joy. At the end of a wedding or at a wedding reception when the bride and groom are introduced, people often celebrate and express their joy with applause.

APPLAUSE and AUTHORIZATION

We need to remember that the question of right and wrong hinges on authority. It is not a matter of whether or not we think applause is appropriate; the real question is whether or not God has authorized

applause. Colossians 3:17 demands that we approach this question in this way.

APPLAUSE IN WORSHIP ASSEMBLIES

There is no authority to use applause in our worship assemblies. Look at the list above: 1) Applause to harass or distract would certainly not be appropriate. 2) Applause as praise to a performer cannot be correct in worship because our worship is to be praise to God, not to men. John 4:24 should remind us that God is the audience in worship; worship is not done to entertain us. 3) For this same reason we would not applaud in respect to a person in our worship.

Some have tried to introduce applause into our worship assemblies under numbers 4) and/or 5) above — the idea that applause can be endorsement or agreement, or that it can be done simply as a joyful response of celebration. The problem with this is that our worship must be as God dictates. If we are going to worship in truth (John 4:24), we do not have the right to introduce things that seem appropriate to us. We are taught exactly how to express endorsement or agreement in the formal setting of worship. First Corinthians 14:16 talks about saying “Amen” at the giving of thanks. Where is the New Testament verse that talks about applauding?

Also, the two are not exactly parallel. Yes, there are times when we use applause in our society to express something similar to “Amen.” However, we can see there is a slight difference. If someone preaches that it is a just thing for God to punish those who persecute the church (II Thess. 1:6), I can say “Amen.” But applause would just as clearly be out of place as a response to the idea of God’s vengeance.

Yes, worship can at times be occasions of joy and celebration. But it is a formal setting (see I Cor. 14), and it is not suitable to turn it into a sporting event or pep rally atmosphere. There is much to be joyful for

in worship, but remember that all of it has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. It is not a light thing to be celebrated by a party atmosphere or raucousness. We are to do all things decently and in order, for this is a formal and serious setting. “High fives” are no more appropriate in worship to God than cartwheels are.

There is never a time when applause is appropriate in a worship setting. It is not authorized, and it is not suitable for what worship is about.

WHAT ABOUT APPLAUSE AT A BAPTISM?

Baptism is not worship. It is obedience and service, but it is not worship. When someone requests baptism during our worship assembly, in the spirit of the “same day” (Acts 2:41) or the “same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33) we may end, or temporarily suspend our worship to take care of this important matter. But baptism is not worship.

Does this mean that applause is appropriate in response to a baptism? Can we use applause to celebrate or to express our joy at the salvation of the soul? Certainly there is great joy involved (Acts 8:39). Let me suggest some concerns about clapping in response to a baptism:

1. Applause is ambiguous. Are we praising the person who is doing the baptizing? Are we praising the person who is being baptized? What exactly does our applause mean?
2. Baptism is a re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and it represents our own death to sin (Rom. 6:1-6). While it is a joyful thing, it is also very sobering, dealing not only with salvation, but with somber matters. Is it appropriate to applaud at such things? Does this lend itself to a proper appreciation of what is going on, or does it distract from it?
3. In a society where people are selling out Bible practices and Bible authorization for what feels good, excites the senses, and pleases us, with little to no regard for what pleases God, shouldn't we be careful about doing anything that appears to fall into this category?
4. Where is the Bible authorization

for applause at this serious moment? Worship is appropriate. Singing to express our joy (James 5:13) is authorized. But where is any verse of the New Testament that suggests that Christians can respond to baptism as if it were a sporting event, a political rally, or even a wedding? If applause is appropriate, how about pompoms, cartwheels or fireworks?

Before we blindly say that applause in response to a baptism is ok because baptism is not a formal worship assembly, remember that it is a spiritual setting — a setting that is appropriate for worship — a setting that is not appropriate to simply give in to hype and sensationalism for the pleasing and exciting of the senses.

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Preparing Elders...

(Continued from page 91)

the gainsayers” becomes glaringly obvious. God’s presbytery must be not only educated in the Word, but also experienced at instruction. Being “apt to teach” implies these men have shown themselves already capable teachers. We cannot expect men of “appointable age” to suddenly become teachers of the Word if never allowed or encouraged to do so in their younger years. Paul rebuked the Hebrews for failing to develop themselves as teachers. Unlike the babe who “is unskillful in the word of righteousness,” teachers, in this case elders, are those, “who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:13,14).

Congregations need to consider actively, not passively, encouraging men of all ages to teach. This does not necessarily imply sponsoring their attendance at a preaching school. Individual congregations proved adequate sources of instruction with our first century brethren. Even if these men assume only the office of a deacon, or no office at all in their lives, an educated and experienced brotherhood can only strengthen the Lord’s body.

Our present universal lack of

elders cannot continue. A congregation with capable elders not only advances in maturity, but it also places at the door of the sheepfold, men able to ward off wolves and adequately feed the Lord’s heritage entrusted to them. Our hope lies within the hearts of the young men still capable of fashioning godly qualities and avoiding errors which will take them out of future consideration. More importantly, we must fervently pray to the Lord of Hosts for men to rise up and take hold of this most important work.

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

You can contact me for more information" **...Jerry Brewer, txbrew@itlnet.net, Elk City, OK.** "The Weaver church of Christ, which is a SOUND congregation of about 55 Christians in the friendly small town of Weaver (near Anniston, Alabama) is looking for a minister. If interested, please call Ralph Hammett at 256-435-4884 for more information; and send resumes to: Weaver church of Christ, c/o Ralph Hammett, P.O. Box 191, Jacksonville, AL 36265" **...Ralph Hammett, Jacksonville, AL.** "Here are some interesting facts that proponents of abortion need to consider. The immune system of the mother detects 'foreign' tissue in the body and immediately sets up a defence against it. In 1998, researchers at the Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, USA, found that the embryo produces a special enzyme, called indoleamine 2,3-dioxygenase, or IDO. This suppresses the mother's T-cell reaction and allows pregnancy to proceed. Follow up research has shown that the IDO is produced on the embryo side of the placental membrane and not on the mother's side. IDO peaks during the formation of the placenta — the most crucial time for establishing the link between mother and child. Only by suppressing the mother's T-cells can the infant begin to grow. It is interesting that IDO production kicks in on day 6 of the infant's growth. Why day 6? This is because on day 7 the baby will attach itself to the mother's womb so it can begin getting nourishment from the mother. The mother's body will not reject the baby but accept it. This interaction proves that the baby is not a part of the mother but a separate entity that protects itself. Such an arrangement could not have evolved. It had to be in place from the beginning. Psalm 139:13, tells us that God did knit me together in my mother's womb. (Creation, September/November, 2005, p.19-20)" **...Mark McWhorter, Pell City, AL.** "May the Lord bless you in the work you do for His church. I'm grateful I have been blessed with the means to support you in the work of "Seek The Old Paths" **...Ron Shandor, Death Valley, CA.** "May God bless you in your continued endeavor to keep the Lord's church aware of the false teachers and doctrines that continues to threaten the people of the Lord's church. It is great how you continue to stand firm for the teachings and scriptural doctrine of the Lord's church. May God bless you each one and bless the work you do in His name" **...Karen Plew, Mt. Morris, MI.** "My reason in writing this is in reference to a letter by C. J. Rimmer in which he states that if we would stop 'whipping a dead horse' and spend more time praying for individuals who have 'strayed from the pure gospel', perhaps we could bring them back to the fold. I could not agree with him more as we are instructed to try to win back those who have lost their way. However, as it states in I Corinthians, there comes a time when those who refuse to return need to be cut off as a brother. Many brothers have attempted to talk to individuals like Rubel Shelly, Jeff Walling and Max Lucado (among others in the movement seeking to modify the New Testament), all to no avail. Rubel has declined numerous offers to debate/defend his position publicly. I have contacted the elders at Mr. Lucado's congregation ("the church of Max" as we like to call it here) myself but they kept sending me to their 'Missions Statement' on their website. I responded with efforts to question many of their revisions to 'the church' but they chose to ignore my emails after that. This has gone on with many who have tried to win all of these individuals back. Maybe (and hopefully) someday they will return. Maybe someday they will finally realize the error they are preaching; but for now, after many attempts that have fallen on deaf ears, we are to acknowledge them as false teachers like the New Testament so fervently instructs" **...Texas.** "I would like to thank you for holding to the form of sound words. May God bless all your endeavors to expand the borders of our Lord's kingdom. Would you please add me to your mailing list" **...Bill Tester, Mountain City, TN.** "The West Jefferson church of Christ in North Carolina is pleased to announce that we have secured the services of Doug Frazier to fill the position of preacher here. Doug is originally from South Carolina and is a 2004 graduate of the Central Carolina School of Preaching. He has previously served as the Associate Minister at the Warner's

"Brethren, I am in contact with a small church in Chillicothe, Texas, that is in need of a preacher. However, they are unable to support a man with a family. They are seeking a man who is on social security. They have a building which was built in 1980 and provide a good house for the preacher. I still appreciate the work you do with STOP.

Chapel church in Clemmons, NC. Doug is 25 years old. We ask that you keep Doug and the work here in your prayers. Please help us welcome him to our area" **...Mark Miller, West Jefferson, NC.** "Could you please send a bundle of 10 to Tatum church of Christ. I think there are many here who would like to read it. Thank you very much" **...Charles Ivie, Tatum, NM.** "I recently found your web-site and have been listening to WSOJ-LP every chance I get. It is great to put faces and voices with some of the material that I have been reading for years. It is greatly appreciated and needed today. Is it possible to get an audio copy of the lesson by Leroy Brownlow "Preserving The Truth?" I have some that would love to hear it but have no access to a computer. Any help would be appreciated. Thanks again" **...Stan Owens. [NOTE: Anyone can hear these lessons at www.wsoj.net. We have more than 3,500 lessons available. You can search for a certain speaker or subject.]** "Thought I would let you know we have moved to Michigan and working with the Flat Rock Church of Christ, (734) 782-2886, Box 12, 24745 E. Huron River Drive, Flat Rock, MI 48134, dbhoff@verizon.net" **...Douglas & Linda Hoff, Flat Rock, MI.** "May God be with and bless you as you work for the church there. It's really great to receive STOP. Thank you very much" **...Ronald & Ruth Shandor, Death Valley, CA.** "We are writing in regards to your STOP publication. We would like to get on your mailing list. We pick up the publication each time we go up to Gatlinburg, TN. Brother Mack receives it there at the church of Christ. We enjoy the articles very much" **...M/M Lofton Mayes, Nashville, TN.** "It's always a pleasure to receive the STOP paper. I'm very encouraged by all the articles. Thank you for not compromising. Wish I could send a large contribution for all of your great work in the name of our Lord and Savior, but I hope that this small amount will at least help some with the postage" **...Sue McDaniel, Eddy, TX.**

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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