



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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FOUR BASIC TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S PLAN FOR UNITY

John Chowning

Over the past two hundred years there has been much study and genuine concern about the subject of unity, especially among those associated with the American Restoration Movement. This is as it should be because of Jesus' intense concern for it and the extraordinary importance He placed upon it in His prayer to His Father in John 17:20-23. Here, it is written: *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”* From this passage, consider these four basic truths about unity.

Truth #1: There is a plan for unity. Jehovah had an eternal purpose for humanity's salvation (Eph. 3:11). Included in that eternal purpose is the unity of all New Testament Christians. Just as there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4-6), there is only one divine plan for unity. Since it is God's plan, it is perfect. Human ingenuity is not needed to create a plan or to “improve” God's plan. And, as the early chapters in Acts demonstrate, when God's perfect plan is followed, unity results.

Truth #2: God's plan for unity

is only for New Testament Christians. Jesus is quite specific — *“those who believe on me through their word”* (John 17:20). God's plan is only for those who continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). There is no Biblical plan for unity with non-Christians. There is no “open border” policy in the kingdom of heaven. Followers of Christ are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers because righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believers and unbelievers, the temple of God and idols have no communion (no legitimate common ground) with each other. The Good Shepherd's one fold (John 10:16) is only for God's sheep; it does not include any goats to be in with the sheep. Therefore, God's plan for unity also demands division; there is no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11).

Truth #3: God has a pattern for unity. Just as God gave Moses a pattern for the tabernacle, there is a pattern (a template, a blueprint) for unity. Jesus identifies this pattern as being “one just as we are one” (John 17:22). The unity of His Father that Jesus speaks of here is not based upon the fact that they shared the same nature; rather, it is the unity of purpose that He and His Father shared. The God of heaven and His Son had the same goal — the salvation of humanity through Christ's obedience to His Father's will. At no time in His earthly life did Jesus ever deviate from that path. The unity of believers is not some pie-in-the-sky theory; it is patterned after the blood, sweat, and tears of Jesus' obedient example. It

comes from the crucible of reality, not utopic imaginations.

Truth #4: Sanctifying truth is the prominent characteristic of Jesus' example. Jesus never deviated from the path of obedience to God. He never strayed from the fellowship of a common purpose with His Father because He sanctified God's word. His example demands careful consideration. Jesus and His Father were one because of the extreme *reverence* Jesus had for God's written word. “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) expresses Jesus' reverent handling of God's word. Jesus never wrested the Scriptures by twisting God's word to say what He wanted it to say.

Jesus' sanctification of truth is seen in His *contentment* with God's word. He obeyed the charge of Deuteronomy 4:2 to not add to or subtract from the commandments of the Lord. He never identified with the Pharisees who *added* to God's word. He never identified with the Sadducees who *subtracted* from God's word. He never identified with the Herodians who *politicized* God's word. He marginalized any who would break even one of the least commandments and teach others to do likewise. He exalted those who seek to obey every jot and tittle of it (Matt. 5:19).

Jesus' sanctification of truth is seen in His *prioritization* of God's written word. It was preeminent in His life — even in the most extreme circumstances of His life. For example, in the wilderness

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Four Basic Truths...



Editorial...

THE UNITY CHRIST DEMANDS #3

Garland M. Robinson

JUST CHRISTIANS

The unity Christ demands requires that we be neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jew. It is hard for many to comprehend this because they believe everyone has to be one or the other. Yet New Testament Christians are none of these. We are just Christians. We are not any “kind” of Christians. We’re just Christians. The Bible knows nothing of Methodist Christians, Baptist Christians, Lutheran Christians, Catholic Christians, etc. etc. etc.

Let me illustrate it this way, if I invented the very first automobile and drove it to town, people are certainly going to ask (since they’ve never seen one), “what is it?” My answer, “it’s a car.” Their reply is not going to be, “what *kind* of car?” It would be foolish for them to ask that question since it’s the only one that exists. There are no “kinds” of cars, it’s just a car. In the years following, other men make cars (somewhat similar to the original) and kept doing so until there were dozens and dozens and dozens of cars. But none of them were identical to the first car. If they were, they would be the same as the original car. But they weren’t genuine. To the very last one, they added to the features of my car; and, took away from the features of my car. They added what they wanted and they took away what they did not want. They each gave a different name to their own invention such as Roller, Zoomer, Milton, Keeper, etc. etc. They all are fakes, impostors, counterfeits, cheap imitations, as far as the original car is concerned. Few want the original car any more. They like all the inventions and innovations offered by the sparkling and dazzling appearance of these “Johnny come lately” cars because they cater to men. Fortunately, in the world of cars it doesn’t make any difference as to which one you drive, BUT in the world of the original church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), the “bride of Christ” (Rev.

21:2,9), the body of the redeemed (Eph. 1:7; 5:23), it makes all the difference between heaven and hell. Man has no choice as to which church he may be a member of. The choice has already been made by the Lord himself. It’s His way or no way. We must humbly submit our will to the will of the Lord in heaven. Jesus said, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say*” (Luke 6:46)? The Christ is the judge of all the earth, not us (2 Cor. 5:10). So, what “church” are you a member of — the original or cheap imitation? The world of denominations do not make up the church of Christ we read about in the New Testament. They are all divided, the very opposite of what the Lord prayed for (John 17:20-21).

Jesus died and purchased his church with his own blood. It was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. No one asked what “kind” of church it was. It was simply THE church — the only one that existed. On the other hand...

Denominations were established by men, not Christ. They have their origin all over the world, not in Jerusalem where the Lord’s church began (Luke 24:49; Isa. 2:3). They began hundreds of years after the apostles, not in 33 A.D as we read in Acts chapter two. Denominational doctrines are of men, not the apostles and prophets of the New Testament (Eph. 2:20). Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, “*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but **their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men***” (Matt. 15:8-9). Every single denomination (without exception) began at the *wrong place* (all over the world), at the *wrong time* (centuries after the New Testament), by the *wrong man* (*men*) (not the apostles and prophets of the first century) and teach the *wrong doctrines* (not the doctrines of

the New Testament.

Denominations are plants which the heavenly Father did not plant. Jesus said they will be rooted up and cast into the eternal lake of fire. “*...Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*” (Matt. 15:13). “*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone*” (Rev. 19:20). “*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Rev 20:15).

UNITY AT ANY PRICE?

God does not approve of all unity nor does He condemn all division. There are times we must not be united. Many passages tell us so. When there are those who are in error and will not repent, fellowship can not and must not exist between us. “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Cor. 6:17). The teaching of church discipline shows that fellowship (unity) cannot be continued with those who teach and/or practice error and will not repent (1 Cor. 5). The faithful must withdraw themselves from those who do not love and practice the truth (1 Tim. 6:5). Those who teach contrary to sound doctrine are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 1:9). We are to “*...have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (Eph. 5:11).

Compromise among children of God is widespread today. So little concern is shown for the Lord’s Way. Lectureships and seminars are many which promote everything from instrumental music to holy roller pep-rallies. Like Elymas the sorcerer, they stand against the faithful proclamation of God’s Word and do not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord (Acts 13:8-10). They are full of all subtilty and all mischief. They are children of the devil and enemies of all righteousness. Their eyes are full of adultery and they cannot cease from sin. They beguile unstable souls and their heart they have exercised with covetous practices. They are as

cursed children and have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:14-15).

By inspiration, Jude wrote, "...These speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water; carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wan-

dering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 10-13).

I love peace. I hate controversy. I deplore wrangling and contention. I would love to get along with everyone. However, I love the Way of the Lord more. I love it more than my own personal feelings. You must also. The Bible warns of those who depart from the faith and exhorts us to hold steadfast and not follow them. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

As much as we might love peace and hate controversy, we must understand there can be no peace until there is purity first — purity of doctrine — soundness in the faith. "*But the wisdom that is from above is **first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy***" (James 3:17). Bible unity, which is God-approved unity, will not be achieved until those who truly desire it submit themselves to a "thus saith the Lord." They must love book, chapter and verse teaching and preaching. They must do all in the name of the Lord. Paul wrote, "*And whatsoever ye **do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him***" (Col. 3:17).

"WHO HATH BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?"

Roger D. Campbell

That is a Bible question. It is recorded in Romans 11:34. It is found in a context in which Paul has declared that both Jews and Gentiles can have access to God's salvation if they come to Him and stay with Him by faith (Rom. 11:20,32). Is God's plan wise? "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out*" (11:33). Another question: "*For who hath known the mind of the Lord*" (11:34)? The answer, of course, is that no one knows the Lord's mind unless He reveals what He is thinking.

So, back to our question: "Who hath been his counselor?" Many humans think highly of their brain power, but not one of them is infinite in understanding like Jehovah is (Psalm 147:5). A bunch of folks hold themselves in high regard, so surely the Lord would feel privileged to hear their ideas on a variety of matters. Not so, my friend, not so. As humans, we need to learn to "know our place." Our place is not on God's level. There are some realities that I need to face and accept.

God does not need me. In describing the God of heaven to the Athenians who did not know Him, Paul said, "*Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things*" (Acts 17:25). Nope, God does not need me. I am the one who needs Him!

God does need my input. Presidents and prime ministers have hand-selected advisors. In some cases, some of them wield such influence over the national leader that it may be said of them, "The President will not make a move until He has consulted with so and

so." In stark contrast to that, God does not seek or need the advice, suggestions, or "two cents" of any human being, including me. God got along extremely well before any of us came along, and don't you know He will continue to manage things just fine long after you and I leave this world?! It is the height of arrogance to think that my thoughts somehow could be helpful to the Lord. It is blasphemous to think that God somehow would be better off if He would consult me on any particular matter.

God does not need my permission. He does not need my "okay" in order to declare that something is right, required, wrong, or acceptable. If He says that a lying tongue is an abomination, then that is just what it is (Prov. 6:16-17). If He says that the purpose of water baptism is to wash away sins, then that is just what it is (Acts 22:16). If He says that receiving or not receiving physical circumcision has nothing to do with a person's salvation, then that is the way it is (Gal. 5:6). If He says that He will judge the world on the day which He has appointed, then that is exactly what will transpire (Acts 17:31). No, God does not need my permission to speak, act, command, or forbid.

God's thinking is way above ours (Isa. 55:8-9). He does not need human counselors; never has, never will. It is not my business to try and run God's affairs. Rather, I ought to be concerned about finding God's answer to this question: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10).

120 Fawn Dr.
Cleveland, TN 37412

THE NEW CREATURE #2

Bill Boyd

In my previous article (Oct/2019), I documented the almost universal consensus that Romans 8:19-25 is a difficult passage that is subject to various potential explanations. I promised to provide three basic approaches to this text, and to include among those three my own analysis. That is what I will do in this article.

I begin with the suggestion that the passage is a personification; that in this passage the non-rational creation is spoken of as though it were a rational person who is included in our own deliverance in order to assure us of how glorious our actual deliverance will be. Wayne Jackson takes an approach like this, and I encourage my readers to consider what he has said. Bear in mind as you read his comments that he wrote them before the current controversy had reached this level among brethren, and at a time when the most vocal advocates of an eternal earth were the Jehovah's Witnesses. I do not always concur with Wayne Jackson, but I have high regard for him. I appreciate the work he has done in thinking through and commenting on a multitude of controversial scriptural subjects, and for making his explanations readily available to us (see www.christiancourier.com). There are things that appeal to me about Wayne Jackson's analysis. His approach is simple and consistent, it has the fewest difficulties, there is Biblical precedent for such personification, it is in harmony with everything else the Bible teaches, and he does not try to establish or bolster a fundamental doctrine that is not amply and clearly taught elsewhere.

A second approach is the idea that the creation is the non-rational creation, and that it means that the animals, vegetables, and minerals of the earth will be renewed to become the eternal home of the righteous at the second coming of Christ. I encourage my readers to read this explanation from the *Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans* written by Moses Lard. Moses Lard was a Bible scholar who is often ranked in excellence along with J. W. McGarvey. I first became acquainted with the work of Lard when I read his acclaimed *Review of Campbellism Examined*, which he wrote at the request of Alexander

Campbell. When I lived in Nebraska, I learned that he was buried in St. Joseph, Missouri. Because of my regard for Moses Lard, I visited his grave on one of my many trips through St. Joseph, and provided directions to his burial plot for Scott Harp's web page on The History of the Restoration Movement (see www.therestorationmovement.com). Advocates of renewed earth doctrines who think this view is without problems are in denial. If the creation of Romans 8:19-25 is that which is non-rational, how does it earnestly expect, wait, will, groan, travail, and hope? The ready answer for this is that this is a personification, but this answer gets us into Wayne Jackson's territory without the consistency. If the creation exhibits these spiritual qualities by way of personification, then how do we know that the creation itself is not a personification? And how could non-rational material things be "*delivered into the glorious liberty of the sons of God?*" The idea is incomprehensible. This view has the most difficulties, it meets with the most resistance, and the way it has recently reemerged, it has become the most troubling and divisive.

A third approach is that the creation is the rational human creation. Burton Coffman suggests that this is the spiritually lost creation. Coffman explains himself in his commentary on Romans better than some have explained Coffman. Others suggest that the creation is the spiritually saved creation. This latter view is that of Robertson L. Whiteside in *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints in Rome*, and it is that of my father, as expressed in his commentary on Romans, *System of Salvation*, by James W. Boyd (see www.aburningfire.net). In this approach, the "*creation*" is a Christian. This is easy to test for yourself. Read Romans 8:19-21 substituting the word "*Christian*" for "*creation*." The use of the word translated "*creation*" for a rational being is common in the New Testament. Jesus said to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:16). Paul said, "*Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven*" (Col. 1:23). In another place Paul wrote, "*For in Christ Jesus*

neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). In Ephesians 2:10 Paul wrote, "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,*" and a few verses later he wrote of the church as the creation of Christ; "*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man*" (Eph. 2:15). The verb translated "*made*" in the King James Version is translated "*create*" in the American Standard Version. In Ephesians 4:24 Paul wrote, "*put ye on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*" In this very chapter itself (Romans 8), Paul uses the word "*creature*" in reference to rational creatures, including "*angels,*" "*principalities,*" and "*powers*" (see Rom. 8:38-39).

A common objection to this view is that the "*creation*" in Romans 8:19 cannot be included among "*sons of God*" because the text says; "*the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*" I know from experience that this objection is not valid. I am a Christian, and I "*wait for the manifestation of the son of God.*" Every Christian is waiting for this manifestation. Paul said in this very context that we will be "*glorified together*" with Christ, and that the "*glory*" for which we hope has not been "*revealed*" (Rom. 8:17-18). John said, "*Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*" (1 John 3:2). Peter said that our "*living hope*" (1 Peter 1:3) is "*ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Peter 1:5), hence, we earnestly expect and wait for its manifestation. After the judgment, we will know who the sons of God are, and what we shall be.

Romans 8:22 speaks of "*the whole creation.*" It has been suggested that "*the whole creation*" may be the church (see comments on Ephesians 2:15 above). Others have suggested that it may be the whole of humankind, or once again, the whole of God's rational and non-rational creation personified. I suggest that whole of humankind seems to best fit the context and flow of Paul's thought in this view, but as pointed out by

Robertson L. Whiteside in his comments on this passage, “...no hope — no future outlook — is attributed to the whole creation” (p.185). As for “...ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23), these groan along with the rest of the “whole creation,” but the difference is, these have hope.

This latter approach has something going for it that the others do not have. Compare what Paul said in Romans 8 with what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-4 Paul said, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For

in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” And, in 2 Corinthians 5:17 he said, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Read the whole of 2 Corinthians 5 for the context. Here we have the same writer, writing on the same subject, and using the same language. It is the same hope, the same groaning, the same burden, the same

waiting, and the same earnest expectation and desire; why not, then, the same creation?

These are the three major approaches to Romans 8:19-25 that I promised. I encourage you to consider each of them carefully. See for yourself what others are suggesting. This passage is key to renewed earth theologies, but it falls short of a proof text, and without a proof text, their suppositions are difficult to sustain.

wmhboyd@aol.com
647 Finger Bluff Road
Morrison, TN 37357

“THAT USED TO BE A CHURCH”

Mike Tincher

My wife and I often like to go on long drives through the countryside exploring and reminiscing about how things used to be when we were much younger. After a recent excursion it occurred to me that often we would see a building that had either been converted into a home or had been abandoned entirely that was at one time a faithful congregation of the Lord’s church.

This made me sad because a lot of these buildings were places where she and I had worshiped as youngsters. I could see the faces etched in my memory of the brethren that made up these local congregations. Some, we had attended regularly with our families. Others, we had attended while visiting one of the Gospel meetings that were held by most of the congregations at that time. While I’m aware that some of this is due to population changes, I can assure you that the percentage of population decrease doesn’t come close to the percentage of membership decline in the church.

Not only does it make me sad, but also causes me to ask the question we all need to ask. What has happened in the Lord’s church that has led to such a state? We now find a great number of congregations either dead, dying, or completely going off into left field with some form of new doctrine or approach that is not even close to the pattern we find in the New Testament as if it will be the “Silver Bullet” needed to add more members.

A young boy came home from school one day and said, “Dad, I think I flunked my math test.” To which his dad replied, “Son, don’t be negative, be positive.” The son said, “Well dad, I’m positive I flunked that math test.”

Like the young boy, I’m not trying to be negative, I’m being positive. I’m positive that if we don’t heed the Scriptures and make the necessary changes needed, many souls are going to be lost. Many of these souls are currently members of the Lord’s church who either feel all is fine with the current state of things, or who are in denial and have convinced themselves all is fine, or who feel there’s nothing we can do. They’ve given up.

While not even attempting to cover all the possibilities as to why we were once the fastest growing religious group in America, to the realization that we have been in a serious decline for a while, I would like to cover just a few of the major reasons that are actually taking place in the church today that are causing such a rapid decline. Of course, these aren’t all of the reasons but are some the main ones I have observed. They are actually the root to all of the other problems I can think of.

1. A lack of truly qualified leadership by our elders. We need to seek to find men who qualify TOTALLY regarding the qualifications that are taught in Titus 1:6-11 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Not perfect men, but qualified men. Not appointing them just because they are good business or community leaders, or

men who feel their job consists mainly of logistical things such as building maintenance. Why would we need the qualifications set forth in Timothy and Titus to decide what color the stripes should be on a parking lot?

What we must have are men with true backbone to make the often hard decisions that must be made in standing for the Word of God. Such as: 1) oversight of the spiritual growth of a congregation, 2) being watchmen against sin in the local body, 3) guarding against false teaching, 4) overseeing church discipline, 5) educational programs, 6) proper use of God’s money (not the hoarding of it), 7) not worrying about whether their decision is going to be popular, politically correct, or ruffling a few feathers because of a firm biblical stance. We don’t need men who stick their head in the sand when sin presents itself in the congregation because they feel it’s none of their business. It is their business! This awesome responsibility is why 1 Timothy 5:17 shows that not only are they deserving of respect as overseers, but financial support as well. It is, as it should be, a job (work). I’ve heard it said that at most congregations, the preacher does the most of elders’ work and the elders do the most of deacon’s work. Think about it. Even in the church today, most members feel that the preacher is the main man. This is not to be so. They are not the overseers.

2. A lack of strong preaching like Paul instructed Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:2-5. This kind of preach-

ing is considered to be negative by many — a “turn off” they say. Christ taught a tremendous amount more about Hell than He did Heaven. Why? Unless reminded often of what we need to avoid, we become complacent. We become like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-22 — lukewarm.

Too many sound preachers are nearly starved out and too many weak preachers compromise to earn a paycheck. This causes two serious problems. Many good men, especially younger, energetic men, won't enter the ministry because, while not preaching to become rich, they don't want to qualify for public assistance in order to do so, either. Located preaching is hard enough without nearly starving to death, too. The other problem is that, oftentimes, once a sound minister finally gets a decent paying job after nearly starving, he then feels compelled to give the people what they want, to make them happy, not caring what God wants.

3. A weak membership. We need members who are “all in” on their Chris-

tianity. What I mean is, Christians that show in word and deed that being a child of God is the number one focus of their lives, not just a part of their lives. We need members who know God's Word, practice God's Word and live God's Word 24/7. We need Christians who realize and understand that being a “faithful” Christian is not JUST someone whose attendance is good. While no one can do everything, all can do something. I have a pet saying, “If you want more to be committed, commit yourself.” Christianity is NOT a spectator sport. Our focus is to serve, not be served. Look at the pattern of the first century church. It was proactive and outgoing, not “spiritual hospitals” like we see so commonly today. I have said many times that if Paul could in some way be transformed into the twenty first century, what would he think of the state of the church today? The reason I don't use Christ in this example is that He already knows. Overall, do you feel that He is pleased with what is happening in so many congregations today?

In our heart of hearts, we know where we are lacking if we are honest with ourselves. While much lip service has been given to this situation over the years, what are we doing about it? The time to begin is now. Let's not be paralyzed with dread or fear. Let's not be overcome with lethargy. While I fully understand that even though we are to strive to be Christ-like in everything we say and do, we will never fully attain it, but that never gives us an excuse to not give our best.

There are many basic themes of the Bible, but remember that one of the main themes is that God accepts nothing short of our best, never has, never will. If we don't do our true best according to God's Word, perhaps someone in the future will drive by the building where we currently meet and say, “I remember when that used to be where the church met.”

4178 Whitten Ridge Rd
Milton, WV 25541

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ELDERSHIP

James W. Boyd

There are matters that require straight-forward language and our subject is one of them. The Lord's church was established and organized by Christ. It is revealed to us in the New Testament. Christ is head over all things to the church (Col. 1:18). It is organized into local congregations that are overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every member a part of the body. This is the Biblical pattern.

Those who serve in the work as elders and deacons are men who are to have certain qualifications as outlined in First Timothy three and Titus one. Elders have certain duties before God and the congregation. Various terms are used to designate their work, such as elder, pastor, shepherd, presbyter, overseer, and bishop.

Paul stated to the elders of the church of Ephesus, “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” (Acts 20:28-31).

THEIR TASK

Their work is to feed the church the spiritual food, exercise oversight or superintendence and direction of affairs, guard the church from error, whether it comes from Within, Without, or even from among themselves, and to see to it that God's will is done, taught, and respected rather than defiled, perverted, and ignored.

Hebrews 13:7,17, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. ... Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Ruling,

watching, being examples, leading are parts of the work.

First Thessalonians 5:12, “And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you....” Those who are over others in the Lord are the overseers or elders. Their labor includes service to the church, admonishing and teaching the things that must be proclaimed.

First Peter 5:1-3, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” This repeats what has been said plus the prohibition of being “lords”, and acting like bosses. Elders are not dictators nor tyrants. They neither make nor break God's revealed will, but are to uphold truth, defend truth, not legislate truth nor compromise it.

THEIR AUTHORITY

Elderships do have authority to rule, to carry out their God-given function. If they did not have authority, then the very purposes mentioned in the above texts could not be expedited by them. There is no more awesome responsibility on human beings than on elders. They shall give account for everyone in their charge (Heb. 13:17). Paul calls it a “good work” (1 Tim. 3:1).

MEMBERS HAVE A DUTY

The congregation led by elders also has responsibilities to those who lead them. Elders are to be held with honor (1 Tim. 5:17,18); even double honor, including moral, spiritual, and material support, when they perform their duties well.

First Thessalonians 5:12-13 calls for members to have knowledge of them, which means more than simply knowing who they are and calling their names. It means to grant respect due them because of the work they discharge. These verses also teach us to esteem them highly in love. This love is not some weak and mushy sentimentality or a personal affection. We are to love every brother or sister. But God expects members of the church to help, not hinder, the eldership in its work. This is done by consideration, kindness, respect, aid, and assistance.

First Timothy 5:19 teaches us not to receive accusations against an elder except it be by two or three witnesses. Those who lead are subject to criticism. They are not infallible in their work and lives. They are still human beings and prone to mistakes, individually and collectively, just like others. Sometimes some act as if an elder is to be absolutely sinlessly perfect and have infallible judgment, every time, on everything, or he becomes a target. God’s plan that calls for a plurality of elders over each congregation helps to prevent mistakes. When errors are proven, First Timothy 5:20 applies. *“Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear.”* But the Bible teaches it is wrong to receive, accept accusation and criticisms of elders without proper proof. To open a barrage against an elder, openly, publicly, or privately, when there is no support or justification for it, is to sin. Some are very long and loud in talking about and against some elders, but will not talk to and with the elders.

Hebrews 13:7,17, already quoted, teaches us to be mindful of them, considerate, which means literally to have a feeling for. It calls for attentiveness, giving heed, paying attention and conforming. We have a duty to follow their faith, imitate their good lives, obey their decision, submit to their rules. The writer is saying we are not to cause them grief while they do their work, but be a source of joy to them. This does not mean to follow them or any other into doing wrong and sinning against God. The idea is not difficult to understand.

FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

Suffice it to say that leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. It is strange how some in a congregation will ask a man to serve as an elder and then give him the hardest time he can in his work. The relationship of elders to the members is that of leaders and followers — brethren together. Since God expects elders to lead, does He not also expect members to follow? Elders are to feed. Members are to partake of the food offered. Elders are to rule. Members are to submit to that rule. When elders are discharging their duty as the Bible teaches them, they have the right to expect the congregation to feel obligated to hold up their hands and give them support and assistance. There are instances when elderships act arbitrarily and even sinfully. Nobody is required to follow such leadership. When they go astray on some matter, we have the duty to point this out to them rather than create rebellion against them.

It is a sinful deed to be a rebel against those who properly rule. We emphasize properly. We sin to defy those we are to obey if they are doing their duties. Those who serve as elders are brethren in the Lord. They should receive the courtesy every brother is to give to every other brother, and even more, because of the special tasks they are expected to perform.

ABUSE OF POWER

Some elders take advantage of their place and act like they are drivers of their personal slaves. We have known men in elderships who have yet to learn the first principles of being considerate toward the congregation, who have the “I am boss” attitude toward their work. But the failure of some misplaced men who by misfortune have been appointed

over a congregation does not excuse members from their duties. Very rarely is the case when there is not something deserving in an eldership.

We urge elders to be attentive to their work and discharge it with great efficiency. We also urge members of the church to be aware of the responsibilities we all have toward elderships. God’s plan works better than anything man can devise when it is practiced.

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McMinnville, TN 37110*

Four Basic Truths...

(Continued from page 81)

after forty days of fasting, He declared (in essence) that He would choose starving to death over disobeying God’s word (Matt. 4:1-4). He submitted Himself to the suffering and agony of Calvary because “it is written” pre-eminently governed His life (Luke 24:46). The truth of the matter is that the authoritative word of God governed His life from cradle to grave. It was the food that fueled Him (John 4:34). It was His pre-eminent passion (John 5:30). It was His reason for existence (John 6:38). It is the unmistakable example that He set. This is God’s exclusive pattern for unity.

*1625 Bilbrey Park Dr.
Cookeville, TN 38501*

CONTRIBUTIONS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Anonymous..... | \$25 |
| Baker C/C, Baker, FL | \$25 |
| Midway C/C, Murfreesboro, TN | \$100 |
| Connie Barnes..... | \$20 |
| Wood C/C, Woodbury, TN..... | \$50 |
| Anonymous..... | \$25 |
| Anonymous..... | \$80 |
| Mrs. Wilburn Moore..... | \$150 |
| Anonymous..... | \$500 |
| Anonymous..... | \$25 |
| James Williamson, Jr..... | \$50 |
| Jean Ware..... | \$25 |
| Anonymous..... | \$100 |
| Joe Turbeville..... | \$25 |
| Arlington C/C, McMinnville, TN..... | \$50 |
| Del Brantley..... | \$50 |
| Bradford C/C, Bradford, TN..... | \$150 |
| Anonymous..... | \$25 |
| Neelys Bend C/C, Madison, TN | \$125 |

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

Corinthians 5:11 that believers should not keep company with the ungodly. In time, their ungodly practices will rub off on them. The Bible goes on to teach that evil company will corrupt. We live in a society that abhors godly discipline. Parents do not teach right from wrong and use the rod of correction like they should. The Bible does say foolishness is in the heart of a child but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.' Because of failure to discipline by the Scriptures, we have mass shootings, pornography, rudeness, sloppiness, and incompetency in service positions, and now legalized homosexuality — never mind it being contrary to the Scriptures. To protest gay rights, and same sex marriages makes one today guilty of a hate crime. Legalized pornography has bred rape, incest, adultery and pedophilia — not just morals, but in doctrine. Romans 16:17 says not to associate with those who teach false doctrines. Many false doctrines have come down since the New Testament church was organized: celibacy, purgatory, praying to saints, sale of indulgences, salvation by faith only, once saved always saved, and the hyper Calvinistic teaching of being created for hell. We can live in peace without compromising. My hat goes off to brother Thomas for his wonderful and timely article. I praise publications like *Seek The Old Paths* for defending the faith" ...**Leslie Putman, El Dorado, AR.** "I enjoy the straight forward articles in this periodical. Keep up the good work. Thanks" ...**Joe Turbeville, Dresden, TN.** "Thanks for the good work you're doing" ...**James Williamson, Jr., Paden City, WV.** "Thanks. We do so appreciate your soundness and the good articles" ...**Perry & Sandy Sexton, Winfield, TN.** "Bill Autrey has passed away" ...**Yorba Linda, CA.** "I would love to receive the publication of *Seek The Old Paths*" ...**Joe Herren, Silver Point, TN.** "I wish to be added to your mailing list. Thanks for the work you do in spreading the truth from our Lord's breathed words the Bible" ...**Barbara Chism, Ridgely, TN.** "Jean Eaves has passed away" ...**Delano, TN.** "Thanks" ...**Terry Nelson, Martinez, GA.** "Don Gibson has passed away" ...**Smyrna, TN.**

SAD, MAD OR GLAD!

When the Truth is proclaimed (2 Tim. 4:2-4) the hearer will respond in one of three ways: sad, mad or glad. The obedient people on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 responded with gladness (Acts 2:41) while the rich young ruler was sad when he heard the Truth (Matt. 19:16-22). In Acts 7:51-60, some became so mad at what Stephen preached, they stoned him to death.

False accusations were made against Jesus (Matt. 11:19; John 10:20) and the apostle Paul (Acts 26:24) out of anger over the Truth that was proclaimed. Do people generally respond in the same way today? Yes! We are thankful that some are glad to hear the Truth and obey it. But how tragic it is when people respond in a sad or mad way and continue to do so. Why are people sad or mad when Truth is proclaimed? Let's notice three reasons.

1) People are sad or mad when they hear what is NEEDED, not necessarily what is wanted. Some want their ears tickled with fables and foolishness (2 Tim. 4:3-4). They

want to hear that which is smooth and not right (Isa. 30:10). Too many want to hear what pleases them rather than what God demands that must be preached.

2) People are sad or mad when they hear NEGATIVE preaching. It is amazing how some believe there is no place for negative preaching. One cannot read and understand 2 Timothy 4:2-4 and not understand that negative preaching is a part of "God pleasing preaching." The very words "reproving" and "rebuking" demonstrate that. Of course, there must always be the preaching of both the positive and negative.

3) People are sad or mad when they hear NAMES called or mentioned. Is it wrong to identify those who are making havoc of the Truth and/or who are false teachers? Of course not. Fulfilling Romans 16:17-18 demands that it be done. Paul did it in 2 Timothy 2:17-18 and 4:14-15. He was not wrong for doing so. Some will become mad when a false teacher is identified but will not say one thing when that false teacher (by his teaching) causes others to lose their souls. Indeed, isn't that strange. Such is a demonstration of the wrong attitude toward God, His Word and the church.

We must not become mad with the message nor messenger of Truth. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Jerry Joseph

PO Box 1385, St. Peters, MO 63376

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

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