

## Return To The Old Paths

*John Isaac Edwards*

Many churches of Christ have drifted far away from the old paths. We are sounding the trumpet call of Jeremiah 6:16: “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...” We are pleading for a return to the old paths.

1) **Respecting Divine Authority.** The need for divine authority is as old as man himself. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree, whereof God commanded them not to eat, they were sent forth from the garden of Eden (Gen. 2-3). Today, Christ has “...all power in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). He is God’s spokesman (Heb. 1:1-2). His word will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48). Thus, we must do all by His authority. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col. 3:17).

2) **Speaking As The Oracles Of God.** Peter penned, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Pet. 4:11). Many today are like the Jews of old who “...spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language...” (Neh. 13:24). Servants of God in

the first century preached the word of God. “...went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). “...preached the word of the Lord...” (Acts 8:25). “...preaching the word...” (Acts 11:19). “...preached the word of God...” (Acts 13:5). “...preached the word...” (Acts 14:25). “...preaching the word of the Lord...” (Acts 15:35). Their sermons were not filled with comedy, drama or story-telling, but were Scripture-filled, heart-pricking and life-changing messages that were characterized by boldness. They preached the truth that was needed, when and where it was needed. Paul charged Timothy, “Preach the word...” (2 Tim. 4:2). And this we must do today!

3) **Being Organized After The New Testament Pattern.** When the Lord’s people have gone astray, it has generally started with organization! In the Old Testament era, God had judges to rule His people and they demanded, “...Give us a king...” (1 Sam. 8:6). Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus, “...of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). The New Testament pattern of church organization is

set forth in a sentence: “...to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). *Saints* are “...them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus...” (1 Cor. 1:2). *Bishops* are also called “elders” (Acts 20:17) and “pastors” (Eph. 4:11). The Scriptures call for “...elders in every church...” (Acts 14:23), “...in every city...” (Titus 1:5). The work of these men is spiritual and involves taking heed to self, to all the flock, overseeing, feeding, and being ensamples (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). The qualifications necessary to appointment to this office are revealed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. *Deacons* are servants of the local church. Their qualifications are made known in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

4) **Doing The Lord’s Work The Lord’s Way.** We must understand that there is a difference between what an individual Christian may do and what the church as such may do (Mt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:16). The work of the church is directed by Christ, the head of the church (Col. 1:18; 3:17). It is spiritual in nature (1 Pet. 2:5). It is threefold in scope: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). The

local church "...sounded out the word of the Lord..." locally and "...in every place..." (1 Th. 1:8). There were no human missionary societies, but local churches, like Antioch, sent away men to preach (Acts 13:1-3) and supported them in the field, like Philippi, "...sent once and again unto..." Paul (Phil. 4:15-16). They had "...fellowship..." in this manner (Phil. 1:5). Local churches took care of their own benevolent needs, without a single man-made benevolent institution, as disciples "...sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). Within the framework of the local church, men were appointed to "...serve tables" (Acts 6:1-7). When a church had a benevolent need greater than its ability to relieve, brethren in other places, according to their ability, "...determined to send relief..." (Acts 11:27-30). This is how relief work was done in the first century. It is known as "...the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:4). The local church did not infringe on the role of individuals to take care of their own (1 Tim. 5:16), or try to be a humanitarian agency to provide for the suffering of all of society. Local churches were

edified through divine revelation (1 Cor. 14:1-6), as Paul commended the Ephesians "...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" (Acts 20:32).

**5) *Worshipping God In Spirit And In Truth.*** Some have been made to believe that it really doesn't make any difference how we worship. Yet Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). This is with the right attitude and the right standard — "...thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). Early Christians worshiped in this manner: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). They also sang praises to God from the heart (Heb. 2:12; Eph. 5:19), without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music. The Lord's supper was on the first day of the week with the same frequency as the collection for the saints (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

**6) *Gladly Receiving The Word And Continuing Stedfastly In It.*** Note what is said of those

when the church was first established: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly..." (Acts 2:41-42). We need a return to this same spirit today! Will you receive the word of the Lord with gladness, and continue stedfastly? Too many continue for a time, and then fall by the wayside. Remember the Lord promised, "...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). May we be moved and motivated to, "...be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..." (1 Cor. 15:58)!

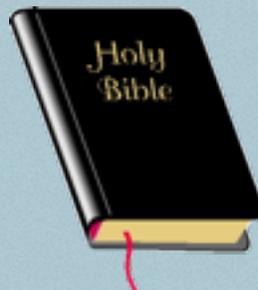
We are pleading for a return to respecting divine authority, speaking as the oracles of God, being organized after the New Testament pattern, doing the Lord's work the Lord's way, worshiping God in spirit and in truth, and gladly receiving the word and continuing stedfastly in it. Will you come join yourself with us in returning to the old paths and holding fast the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13)?

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