



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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IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING FOR DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN

Stephen Atnip

Would you like to bring delight to God?

Would you like to give spiritual pleasure to the heart and mind of God?

Then worship him according to his precepts.

Every age of man has its fashion — the mindset by which it reasons and acts. To the people of his day, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:31, that the fashion of this world passes away. A new fashion takes its place. The *fashion of our world* is the mindset of post-modernism. In this way of thinking, every opinion and idea is equally valid. Your truth may be my error, but it is valid for you, though maybe not for me. There is no absolute truth and none may say to another “what you do is wrong.” There is no absolute right or wrong. This fashion of thinking, though wrong to the core, has entered into our religious culture as well. Each must determine his own set of values religiously and allow to others their equally valid set of values though they may be diametrically opposed to one another. Worship has become a virtual smorgasbord of ideas, ceremonies, and rites.

Yet, into this cultural milieu there enters a voice that was first heard in human form upon this earth in the first century and it dares to run counter to the postmodernistic view of our time. It is the voice of the Son of God and it dares to say that not all forms of religion, and certainly not all forms of worship, are equally valid before

God. As a matter of fact, Jesus actually told some of his day that their worship was vain — without value in meeting the purpose of worshiping God. In other words, not all worship is equally valid.

Jesus said, *“In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:9). This text is found in the context of a confrontation between Jesus and certain scribes and Pharisees who had come down from Jerusalem to ask him why his disciples did not keep what they termed the “tradition of the elders.” Specifically, Jesus’ disciples were not washing their hands before eating.

The tradition of the elders was of tremendous authority for the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. It was a compilation of the teachings of the various rabbis through the centuries as they commented on the Mosaic law. As a matter of fact, they taught there were two parts to the law that Moses had given: 1) the *written law* and, 2) another set of *oral traditions* passed on with the written law. These oral traditions actually held greater authority for many in the Jewish leadership than the original written Law of Moses itself. Jesus responded to their accusation by pointing out that their tra-

ditions had at some points actually caused them to transgress what God had specifically written in the Ten Commandments. He pointed to an act of worship called “corban” where a man could devote all he had to the temple treasury. The problem with this was that a man could live off this devoted money until he died, but no others could benefit from it. And thus, if a man had parents for whom he needed to care, he would say, “It is corban.” He was prohibited by this tradition of the elders from taking money from what he devoted to the treasury, and helping his parents with it. Albert Barnes points out: “the Jewish teachers said that it was more important for a man to dedicate his property to God than to provide for the needs of his parents.” This directly conflicted with God’s law of honoring one’s father and mother. For them, this worship tradition, manufactured by their ancient rabbis, held greater authority than the last six of the ten commandments dealing with our relationship to our fellowman, specifically to honor our parents (Exodus 20:1-17).

To address their error, Jesus went

(Continued on page 12)

In Vain Do The Worship Me...



Editorial...

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM #1

Garland M. Robinson

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold *the doctrine of Balaam*, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. ... Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. — Rev. 2:12-14,16

Some in the church at Pergamos were holding to the “*doctrine of Balaam*.” The Lord was against that — he hated that. He hates everything that is not according to a “*thus saith the Lord*” — the Scriptures. The Bible matters. New Testament authority matters. We must live by it or we will be judged and condemned by it. We must take heed to the Lord's precious Word and everything he hates, we must hate.

The word “doctrine” means teaching, instruction, and/or that which has been taught. Therefore, the doctrine of Balaam is not the teaching “about” Balaam, but rather, what Balaam “taught” — the instruction, direction, guidance, counsel, he gave. The text reveals what that teaching was. He taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication. The Lord hated all three!

Fortunately, the Bible gives the history regarding the incident of Balaam and Balak. A lengthy account is given in the book of Numbers chapters

22-24. His name and wicked deed is recorded many other places throughout the Bible: Numbers 31:7-8,16; Deuteronomy 23:3-5; Joshua 13:22; Joshua 24:8-10; Nehemiah 13:1-2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:12-16; Jude 11. It would certainly be helpful to review what the Bible says in all these texts. But space will not allow an extensive examination in this short piece. I'll leave it to you to study and familiarize yourself with the story. Our focus here is on Balaam's *teaching, instruction, influence, and counsel*. It is needful that we recap the gist of the story.

The Israelites wondered in the wilderness for 40 years before they entered the land of Canaan. On one occasion they pitched their camp in the land of Moab. Balak, the king of Moab, sought to hire Balaam from far away Mesopotamia to come and curse the children of Israel. However, God told Balaam not to go, but when Balak offered him great honor and reward, Balaam conceded and went (Num. 22:12-17). His heart was set on himself, not on God. His intent and purpose was so evil that on his journey the angel of the Lord was standing in his way to kill him but Balaam's donkey saved his life and speaks to him (Num. 22:21-35). Nevertheless, he continues on.

Four separate attempts were made by Balaam to curse the children of Israel, but on each occasion God caused Balaam to bless them. However, Balaam was intent on receiving the reward promised him. If he could not bring God's displeasure upon the Israelites by cursing them, he would figure out another way. He found that way in the counsel he gave to Balak. It was namely this, if you can cause Israel to sin, God will turn from them. Balaam's counsel was to get the Israelites to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab and to offer sacrifices to their gods. Israel will be so defiled that God's wrath will not be held back. That's exactly what they did. They joined the Moabites in their worship

(Num. 31:16; 25:1-3).

Moabite worship included *whoredom* with temple prostitutes, involving the Israelites in immorality, fornication, lewdness, and lasciviousness. Their worship included *idolatry*, involving Israel in sacrilege (defilement, disrespect, desecration, irreverence). These sins were a direct violation of the commandments received at Mt. Sinai. As a result, God sent a plague upon the Israelites and 24,000 of them died (Num. 25:4-9).

Balaam's counsel to Balak was to be a stumblingblock to God's people — encouraging/influencing them to sin. Shall we not learn from this shameful incident?

TEMPTATION

The people of Israel were tempted to sin. When we place ourselves in a situation where we're going to be tempted to sin, we're not headed in the right direction. Temptation can make us weak and more prone to give in to temptation. Why would any child of God place themselves in the middle of a situation where temptation is great? We ought to stay as far away from it as possible. God's word says, “*abstain from all appearance of evil*” (1 Thess. 5:22). “*Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation*” (Matt. 26:41). “*They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*” (Gal. 5:24).

When we fight temptation and refuse to yield to it, we keep ourselves pure and our mind on the right track. “*The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished*” (2 Peter 2:9). Paul said, “*this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:13-14). That means we do not put ourselves in the middle of temptation. That's staying away from it.

We can overcome. The Lord will help us. “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it]*” (1 Cor. 10:13).

COMPROMISE

Balaam's doctrine (counsel) was to compromise. The Israelites compromised both their morals and their worship. Compromise with wickedness is never good. The Lord's way is an exclusive, singular, unique way. It does not allow union and participation with any but the way of truth and holiness.

The Lord's way does not allow compromise with Religions of the World. In the political correctness of today, the march-word is "toleration" — "truce." The only thing considered wrong in this man-made philosophy is to say there is only one exclusive way and all other ways are wrong. The world allows compromise with all religions. However, the Lord and master of the universe says, "*I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the father but by me*" (John 14:6). That excludes all religions of the world except Christianity. I'm sorry, but that is not my opinion. That is not just the way I see it. That is the way that is RIGHT. It is the Lord that made us and not we ourselves (cf. Psa. 100:3). Therefore, His way is right. What He says, is the way it is! That makes no allowance for Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or any other religion in the world. They are wrong — they're all wrong — every last one of them. They are man-made, not haven-made. To compromise with them is the way that leads to the eternal death of our soul. It may "seem right" to a lot of people, but the end thereof are the ways of death (cf. Prov. 14:12; 12:15; 16:25; 30:12).

The Lord's way does not allow compromise with Denominations. Though there are similarities between the Lord's church and denominations (unlike world religions), it is still compromise to join them in worship and practice (fellowship). The Lord says NO! The principle of Ephesians 5:11 is very clear: "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" The Lord did not say we can have a little fellowship with them. He said no fellowship with them. Instead of fellowshiping them, He said reprove them. That is, we expose them for what they are, show the error of their way, make it clear where they stand and whom they serve. Though they claim to be "believers", they have never obeyed

DENOMINATIONALISM

1. Many bodies/churches
2. Founded by men
3. Human heads
4. Human creeds
5. Human names
6. Follow men
7. Membership in denominations not necessary
8. Preach many gospels
9. Rewrite creeds every few years
10. Many faiths
11. Many baptisms
12. Join churches
13. Abide in (denominations)
14. Walk by different rules
15. Thank God in prayer for so many churches

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. One body/church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:20)
2. Founded by Christ (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20)
3. Christ the head (Eph. 1:22-23)
4. Bible the only creed (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3)
5. Wear the name of Christ (1 Peter 4:16)
6. Following men is condemned (1 Cor. 1:10-13)
7. Membership in Christ's church essential (Eph. 5:23)
8. One gospel (Gal. 1:8-9)
9. Bible remains the same (Matt. 24:35)
10. "One faith" (Eph. 4:5)
11. "One baptism" (Eph. 4:5)
12. Lord adds to the church (Acts 2:47)
13. Abiding in Christ the true vine (John 15:1-6)
14. Walk by the same rule (Phil. 3:6)
15. Christ prayed for oneness (John 17:20-21)

the Gospel nor do they worship in truth — according to God's word (John 4:24). Therefore, Christians cannot be joined with them. Instead, we are to come out from among them and be separate (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Denominations are wrong in Name. They wear names of men, methods or philosophies — names representing forms of government, doctrines and practices. The Lord's church wears the Lord's name, not the name given by men. Congregations are called "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). The Lord's name is above every name (Phil. 2:9). It is at the name of Christ that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Phil. 2:10). Disciples were called "Christians" first at Antioch (Acts 11:27). There is no other name by which men can be saved (cf. Acts 4:12).

Denominations are wrong in Authority. They have councils, conferences, synods, disciplines, manuals, creeds and traditions. However, the Lord's church has the divinely, inspired word of God. It is infallible — our guide to heaven (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It furnishes all we need to be pleasing to God (2 Peter 1:3). It is the document by which we will be judged when we stand before the Lord (John 12:48). No other

book will be opened from which we will be judged (cf. Rev. 20:12). We show our respect for the authority of Christ when we respect and obey his word. It doesn't make any sense to be a member of something religiously that does not demand scriptural authority for everything they do (cf. Col. 3:17).

Denominations are wrong in Doctrine. The chart above shows several contrasts between the doctrines of denominationalism and the doctrine of Christ.

Those who sit at the feet of denominational preachers are told to receive Christ as their "personal Savior" or pray the "sinner's prayer" in order to be saved. According to John 1:12, those who believe in Christ are not automatically sons of God, but are given the power (right, privilege) "to become" sons of God. According to the Bible, a sinner is saved from sins ONLY when he **BELIEVES** (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24), **REPENTS** of his sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30), **CONFESSES** Christ before men (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10), and is **BAPTIZED** for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). This is the ONLY plan taught in the Bible by which one can be saved from past and alien sins.

The Lord's church is not a denomination. It is not part of a whole or one of a series of units, but the ONLY church that one can read about in the Bible. Christ promised to build HIS church (Matt. 16:18), not a man's church. He died for HIS church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), not anyone else's church. Christ is the Savior of HIS body which is the church (Eph. 5:23; Eph. 1:22-23). He's not the savior of any other body. Since denominationalism is man-made (not being authorized by God), we must be members of the Lord's church in order to be saved. We must faithfully serve Christ in His kingdom.

The Lord's church is not allowed

to compromise with denominational groups nor even other churches of Christ who are not sound in the faith. Sadly, there are many congregations among us like those mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 with whom the Lord is not pleased. If they don't repent and come back to the truth, they will be condemned. The faithful must not compromise with them. This is made very clear in 2 John 1:9-11: "*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house,*

neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Balaam's counsel was to compromise with the enemy. God's faithful children today must not compromise with the enemy. A great number of churches of Christ today are in apostasy or heading that way. Many of them don't even realize it. It's been so long since they have heard the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) that they have drifted far from shore. We need to work to bring them back. James says "...he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

In Vain Do The Worship Me...

(Continued from page 9)

back a little over 700 years to a prophetic rebuke given by Isaiah to the worshipers of his day and time (Isa. 29:13). While it would be a highly worthwhile and advantageous study to look at all facets of that rebuke, our study centers on this phrase by Jesus, "*In vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men.*" The Greek word for vain means fruitless, without purpose, or not meeting its purpose. Now, that immediately brings up the question of "what is the purpose God had in mind for worship?"

You and I are creatures that were designed with capacities for various functions in this life. One of the capacities granted to us was the capacity for worship — the adoration, reverence, and respect shown to our Creator through various acts performed physically and spiritually. Yet as with most of our capacities, our use of them does not always perform their intended purpose. We often use our capacities for our own ends and not the ends for which our heavenly father designed them. That is true in the physical realm; that is, when we use our physical bodies to do those acts which disgrace Him and bring shame to His high and holy name. It is also true in the Spiritual realm when we use our emotions and intellect to hate what God loves and love what he hates. Our capacities, or human characteristics, were granted to us with purpose, and

it is only when we exert ourselves physically and spiritually according to his written word that we shall be found to have used our capacities for His purposes.

In quoting Isaiah, Jesus speaks of worship using the word *sebomai*, which means "to express in gestures, rites or ceremonies one's allegiance or devotion to deity" (Arndt and Gingrich 917). Inherent to the word is the concept of "reverence" for the deity one worships. Jesus uses the Greek word *sebomai* to translate the Hebrew verb *arey* in Isaiah 29:13, meaning "to fear, revere, be afraid, to stand in awe of, reverence, honor and respect." It doesn't mean just one of these words; it means all of these concepts. Isaiah points out that what makes their reverent approach in worship to God invalid is when "their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men." Thus taken together, it means that in worship, one expresses his reverence, fear, and feeling of awe toward God by means of gestures, rites or ceremonies which are designed by God rather than by man who is the worshiper. All valid worship starts with a fear of God. And, Jesus says in quoting Isaiah, when men substitute their own commands (gestures, rites, or ceremonies) for the commands of God, they are failing to reverence the God they intended to worship. Or as Jesus says, It is "vain." Such worship fails to accomplish the purpose God designed when he gave us the capacity to worship Him. And as Emmanuel (God with us), Jesus certainly knew how to fulfill the purpose of worship, and

when worship was accepted and when it was not accepted by God. Jesus knew when worship was vain as no other has ever known. Worship that is based on a decree that comes from man is in reality a worship in which man presumes the right of sovereignty over the God he claims to worship, and thereby fails to fear and reverence him.

Our study of this text does not end here. There is in that sense of purpose another aspect to be considered. What does God receive from our worship? If my worship is in vain, then the God I attempted to honor has failed to be honored. The God I have been called to respect has been disrespected. The God before whom I am to stand in awe, has been bereft of the expression of awe due him. You see, we come to worship God at his summons. God calls for the action of worship, but a worship that meets its intended purpose with regard to Him.

When the focus of our worship is changed by the gestures, rites and ceremonies that have been decreed by men, the God I was supposed to be honoring has been denied that which is due Him by right of Creatorship, by right of the redemption of man, His guardianship, sovereignty and governance over his creatures, and by right of his love, justice, mercy, and by right of his Fatherhood over men.

What does God receive in worship done according to His word? If I know this, then I am better able to appreciate why I should worship in a way that meets the purpose of worship. Perhaps if we look at worship situations in the

past, we may glean from them something of what God receives in proper worship. In 1 Samuel 15:22, God had called for a sacrifice by Samuel for Israel. King Saul grew tired of waiting for Samuel and presumptuously officiated as a priest at the sacrifice. Samuel then asks a question, *“Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”* There is an implication in this passage that something had been removed from what God should have received if an obedient sacrifice had actually been given. God failed to “find delight” in that sacrifice. By implication, we then realize that if the sacrifice had been properly given, then what was missing in God would have been present in God. He would have delighted, or had pleasure in the worship. Proper worship gives delight to God. It gives spiritual pleasure to God. Men can actually create a sense of delight and spiritual pleasure in God with their worship. He likes it. He enjoys it. It pleases him. Would you like to bring delight to God? Would you like to give spiritual pleasure to the heart and mind of God? Then worship him according to his precepts.

When Noah came off the ark he worshiped God by sacrificing to him. Genesis 21:8 says *“The Lord smelled a sweet savour.”* The Hebrew language is fascinating here. It literally means, He smelled a soothing, quieting, tranquilizing odor of soothing as he received the worship of Noah. God responded with a blessing upon man and the earth. The evil of man had caused God to devastate this world, while the worship of Noah soothed the mind of God. It brought delight to God to find a worshiping man like Noah to repopulate his world. Worship delights, gives pleasure to God and is soothing to him. That is its intended purpose on God’s part. But if man, by his own precepts, adds his own gestures, rites and ceremonies to worship, it becomes vain and does not reach its intended purpose.

As a matter of fact, when man worships according to his own standards, there is another reaction from God that worship was never intended to elicit from God. In Isaiah 1:11-15, God points out what “wrong worship” elicits from God. The error of their worship on this occasion sprang from

the immoral conduct of their lives. You see, part of the equation of worship is the acceptance of both the gift and the giver. The giver must be righteous

before God. That is not required by the doctrinal teaching of many today.
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ETERNAL LIFE

Bill Boyd

Man was made for eternal life. This life was his in the beginning, but when man chose sin, the life he had in Eden was taken from him and spiritually, he was dead (Gen. 2-3). The life that was lost in the garden is restored in Christ. *“In him was life”* John said (John 1:4), and Jesus said *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10).

There is a sense in which eternal life is spoken of as a future reward for *“the righteous”* (Matt. 25:46) that they will receive *“in the world to come”* (Mark 10:30), and therefore *“he that soweth of the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”* (Gal. 6:8). In this sense the righteous have eternal life in promise. Jesus died that *“they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance”* (Heb. 9:15). *“This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life”* (1 John 2:25). Therefore we have eternal life in hope. Paul wrote to Titus *“in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began”* (Titus 1:2) and told him that being justified by grace we are made *“heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:7).

But there is more to eternal life than eternal existence. Having been made spiritual beings in the image of God we will all exist eternally, but for some, this will be *“eternal punishment”* (Matt. 25:46). The eternal life Christ brings to us is not just eternal in duration, but it is also eternal in its qualities. The eternal qualities of eternal life are the qualities of the spiritual life we now have in Christ. That is why some passages speak of eternal life as a present possession. *“God hath given to us eternal life,”* John wrote, *“and this life is in his Son”* (John 5:11). *“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life”* (John 3:36). Jesus himself said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”* (John 5:24).

God hath blessed us with *“All spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* (Eph. 1:3). These spiritual blessings include the fellowship we have with God (1 John 1:3), the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), the joy unspeakable and full of glory that comes by love and faith (1 Peter 1:8), the peace of God which passeth understanding (Phil. 4:7), the love of the brethren (1 John 3:14), and all the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). These blessings are eternal in nature and they constitute the eternal qualities of our spiritual life in Christ.

Someday we will physically die and leave all our temporal earthly blessings behind, but the eternal spiritual blessings we have in Christ will remain ours in eternity. This is what Jesus was speaking of when he said to Martha, *“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”* (John 11:26); and, this is what Paul was writing about when he wrote in 1 Timothy 4:8, *“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”*

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"THEY WENT OUT FROM US"

Marvin L. Weir

It is imperative to know where you are and whether or not you should be there. Christians are to be followers of Christ. Brethren today who have drifted so very far from the truth did not follow Christ to get there. The question of Amos is as revealing today as it was when originally asked: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3)? The obvious answer is a resounding "NO!" Israel chose to turn her back on Jehovah, forsaking Him for other "gods." Did Israel agree with God? Were they walking with God? Absolutely not! Adam Clarke comments as follows: "While ye loved and served me, I dwelt in you and walked among you. Now ye are become alienated from me, your nature and mine are totally opposite. I am holy, ye are unholy. We are no longer agreed, and can no longer walk together. I can no longer hold communion with you. I must cast you out." (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, Electronic Database, BibleSoft, Inc.).

This Bible principle is as true today as it was during the days of Amos. Peter admonishes those to whom he writes: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Christ always did the will of His Father (John 4:34; 5:19). The "steps of the Father" and the "steps of Christ" do not travel in opposite directions. John writes to the elect lady and her children, whom he loves in the truth, saying, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 8-11).

When will a brother or sister lose the things they have wrought for the cause of Christ? Answer: when they go onward and abide not in the teaching (doctrine) of Christ! We are now living (and have been for many years) in a

time when so many members of the Lord's church are "jumping traces" and refusing to follow the lead of Christ. Many brethren now take great pride in adamantly refusing to submit to the authority of Christ. Denominational gimmicks and the innovations of those consumed with secular education now replace, in many congregations, the simplicity and wisdom of the Word of God.

Before we comment on what John instructs the faithful to do, let us note some instructions John DOES NOT give.

- Show support for false teaching and tolerate error.
- Encourage brethren who persist in error.
- Aid and assist brethren who steadfastly refuse to abide in the teaching of Christ.
- Fellowship those who have not God.
- Accept the false teacher's word that he is not a false teacher in spite of his false teaching.
- Employ "situation ethics" and cry that in certain situations the church must abandon authorized Scripture and implement man-made plans.
- Give brethren 30 years with full fellowship to see if they will come to their senses and repent.

Now, let us observe what John instructs faithful brethren to do when individuals and congregations depart from the faith and refuse to repent. Christians who depart from the truth, take pride in so doing and refuse to repent, qualify as "antichrists" and should not be fellowshiped (1 John 2:18-19).

What must faithful brethren do?

- Understand that one who refuses to abide in God's Word does not have fellowship with God.
- Be willing to stand in the truth even if they must give up friends so that they can have fellowship with the Father and Son.
- One who is a false teacher must not be received in the same manner as a teacher of truth.
- One who is a false teacher must not be greeted as if he is a sound teacher.

- When one, in any way, aids, encourages (to sit at his feet and listen encourages him), assists, or promotes a false teacher, he is guilty of partaking "in his evil works."

Brethren, it is not the fault of the faithful that erring members of the body choose to go "out from us." In so doing, however, these erring brethren prove they are not "...of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us" (1 John 2:19).

Again we ask, "Shall two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3)? Let us steadfastly refuse to walk hand in hand with error!

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| Terry & Linda Shanks | \$100 |
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| Beginning Balance | \$7,021.86 |
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Elder's COLUMN

JESUS' FIRST RECORDED BIBLE CLASS

John Chowning

Because the Scriptures are everything they claim to be, a Bible class teacher must persevere week after week, just like Jesus did.

Profitable Bible study in a public setting does not happen by accident. Both the teacher and the student(s) have essential responsibilities to carry out. For a student to be able to receive with meekness the engrafted word of God, he must be swift to hear (ready to listen), slow to speak (argue with God's word), and slow to wrath (not easily offended by the truth). In addition, he must separate himself from all unholiness if he desires the Holy Scriptures to save his soul (James 1:19-21).

Luke 4:17-27 records a summary of Jesus' first public Bible class. In this passage one can readily discern the following responsibilities of a Bible class teacher:

Focus on the text of the Scriptures by reading it (Luke 4:17-20). Jesus' instruction was rooted in and came from the written word of God. Though no title for this prophecy of Isaiah is given, it could easily be: "Why Did My Savior Come to Earth?" When allowed to speak for itself, the word of God is always vivid and solemn in its description of sin. It is never ambiguous. Isaiah 61:1-2 (the passage read by Jesus) is no exception. Here, God's word describes sin as impoverishing and bankrupting (poor), destructive and devastating (brokenhearted), oppressive and enslaving (captives), blinding and abusive (blind...bruised). In Scripture, sin is never a laughing or lighthearted matter.

Thankfully, Jehovah's solution to sin is also presented in Isaiah's detailed prophecy. "Hallelujah, What a Savior!" is a fitting summary of the Messianic portion of this prediction. The Gospel preached by God's anointed One offers: a Benefactor who enriches the bankrupt; a Physician that heals the brokenhearted and blind; and a Redeemer who releases those being crushed in captivity.

Emphasize the relevancy of the Scriptures by applying them (Luke 4:21). Though Isaiah's prophecy was written about seven hundred years prior to this Sabbath day in Nazareth, it still was relevant to the students in Jesus' class. In this case, it was probably more relevant than they could have possibly imagined! In Jesus' case, He was teaching from the covenant under which He lived and died. But, even when a New Testament Christian is studying from the Old Testament, the Scriptures are still relevant. The examples of the Old Testament were written for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:1-13); thus, they are still helpful to us. The hundreds of specific, plain, predictive Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillments recorded in sacred and secular history resoundingly testify the ever-relevant truth that the "testimony of the Lord is sure" (Psalm 19:7). God's word is perpetually relevant to mankind, regardless of the century in which he lives.

Affirm the simplicity of the Scriptures by speaking plainly (Luke 4:22). The word *chrestos* in this passage is thought-provoking. When used in Matthew 11:30 to describe the yoke Jesus offers, the word is translated "easy." Hence, the conclusion that the "gracious words" which proceeded out of Jesus' mouth were easily understood. He spoke plainly and simply. None of the polysyllabic jargon of theologians, or the mumbo jumbo of humanistic psychobabble, or the esoteric erudition of educationally-decreed egotists can be considered "gracious" speech. There is no need for it when studying the simple profundity and profound simplicity of God's word. According to 2 Timothy 3:14, Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures from a child (literally, a baby). What an enduring monument to the simplicity of God's Word! So simple it is that the only way to misunderstand many of its

passages is with some help! A good Bible teacher does not want to provide *that* kind of help.

Demonstrate the authority of the Scriptures by confronting sin (Luke 4:23-27). The students in Jesus' Bible class had a sinful attitude toward Him (v.23) and a hard heart toward God (vs.24-27). By this point in His ministry, He had already performed enough miracles to convince Nicodemus that He was a teacher from God (John 3:2). His words to the Samaritan woman and the citizens of Sychar had been enough to generate faith in many and produce the conviction that He indeed is the Christ, the Savior of the world (John 4:41-42). Therefore, their desire for Him to entertain them with His miraculous power was sinful; plus, their unbelief spawned by a hardness of heart (and not a lack of adequate evidence) was sinful and inexcusable; thus, Jesus confronted it. So effective was his use of the Scriptures' authority, Luke records: "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Luke 4:28-29).

Prove your faith in the essentiality of the Scriptures by persevering (Luke 4:30-31). "But he passing through the midst of them went his way, and came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days." Jesus stopped teaching in Nazareth, but He did not quit teaching God's word. He persevered. Because the Scriptures are everything they claim to be (inspired, inerrant, authoritative, powerful, essential), a Bible class teacher must persevere week after week, just like Jesus did.

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BROKEN-HEARTED BECAUSE OF LOST SOULS

Maybe it is a life of unbridled immorality. It might be a fellow defiantly refusing to accept the Lord's authority. Perhaps it is a person who has been swept away by false teaching. For others, it could be that indifference has taken root in their heart. Regardless of what the reason(s) might be, when a soul is lost, it is an immeasurable tragedy.

Sin stains the soul. Sin slays those who practice it. Sin separates its participants from the Lord. Sin slams shut the door to heaven. Yes, sin stains, slays, separates, and slams. Sin is one hundred per cent detrimental.

As we think about the horribleness of sin, we are reminded that our Father calls on all of His children to be tenderhearted (Eph. 4:32). Each of us has his/her own unique personality/character/makeup. Some Christians rarely show their emotions outwardly, but they have a tender, caring heart. Others among us tear up, blubber, and sob at the slightest provocation. Surely we all have this in common, though: we are saddened by the fact that people live and die outside the Lord.

The God of heaven is devastated when humans refuse to submit to Him and accept His salvation. In speaking about the rebellious Jews of Ezekiel's generation, God said, "...I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations" (Ezek. 6:9). Man's sin crushes God's heart.

Do you recall how Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem because its inhabitants would not accept Him as the Messiah, and by rejecting Him brought condemnation on their souls? As He approached the city in what some call His "Triumphant Entry," despite the excitement of some, His heart was broken. Luke's concise record says, "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). A few days later, as He was drawing ever closer to the cross, the sadness in His heart sounded forth in these words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matt. 23:37).

God's servants are broken-hearted too, when people are lost. Jeremiah is labeled as "the weeping prophet" because we read about how his tears flowed due to the Jews' choice not to obey the Lord God (Jer. 9:1).

Have you ever paid attention to the following statement which the writer of the book of Psalms made to God? "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psalm 119:136). It is not revealed whom "they" were or what specific transgressions they had committed, but the Psalmist's heart was devastated by their disobedience and what such did to their relationship with the Lord.

Among the early Christians, more than once we read about the apostle Paul being moved to tears because of false teachers and departures from the faith. As he was telling the shepherds of the church in Ephesus about a future departure from the truth, he reminded them that

for three years he had warned them night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). While in chains in Rome, he wrote a letter to the saints in Philippi, warning them about enemies of the cross. As he brought up that unpleasant topic, he said he was weeping as he wrote (Phil. 3:18). The man was broken-hearted because of sin and its affect on people's eternal destiny.

Some look at the masses of the world who are steeped in spiritual darkness and just seem to shrug their shoulders with the observation, "Well, it always has been like that; there is not much we can do about it." Perhaps others of us have become desensitized to sin. We see it and hear it so much that it kinda feels like it is no big deal. May God help us if we ever get to the point that we view sin as a small matter. And God help us if we do not share His broken heart when people live and die separated from Him.

Compassion causes Christians to communicate to lost people what they need to hear, which is God's eternal, soul-saving truth. "Oh, will you not tell it, today?"

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