

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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OVERCOMING NON-CONTENDERS FOR THE FAITH

Leon Cole

To many Christian parents, it is far more important that the congregation have a gymnasium and constant youth programs than it is for their children to hear the truth of God's Word and learn the rigorous disciplines of a Christian life.

Jude 3 reads, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that *ye should earnestly contend for the faith* which was once delivered unto the saints."

It is apparent that Jude intended to write a discourse about the common salvation, but the influence false teachers were having in the church made it necessary to write this short letter exhorting brethren to contend earnestly for the faith. If he had written on the common salvation he would have emphasized that the common salvation was not ordinary or lacking in distinction but rather it was available to all — Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But because false teachers had slipped in proclaiming corrupt doctrines that could cause one to forfeit this salvation, there was now a need to contend for the faith.

The term "faith" is used basically in two senses. There is the personal subjective faith *expressed by an individual and then there is the thing that is believed*. As Jude uses it here, it is the idea of the whole Gospel system. In Acts 24:24-25, it is said that Felix sent for Paul and heard him concerning "the faith in Christ" and Paul reasoned with him of "righteousness, temperance and judgment

to come." They heard him concerning the faith in Christ, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. This shows us the faith is more than just the death, burial and resurrection of Christ which are the facts of the Gospel. Jude's declaration is equivalent to Paul's language of Philippians 1:17, "I am set for the defense of the gospel." It is the whole spectrum of Christ's teaching.

That is the way John styled it in II John 9, "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." Paul said, "Fight the good fight of faith" and "lay hold on eternal life" (I Tim. 6:12). It is the idea of "holding fast the form (pattern) of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13).

Jude says "earnestly contend for the faith. The Greek word rendered "earnestly contend" is a compound word which carries with it the idea of a combatant in a wrestling match. He is to be both *defensive* and *offensive*. He is to avoid being thrown while at the same time trying to succeed in throwing his opponent. There is great energy and intensity expressed here. This was the strategy that Paul employed when facing false brethren. He says at Galatians

2:4, "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Jude further declares that this faith has been once delivered to the saints. He is not saying that the faith was simply delivered. Rather the word "once" carries with it the idea of "once for all, of perpetual validity and not requiring repetition." It is like the statement in Hebrews 9:28, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." Christ is not offered again and again. His sacrifice is complete and there is an urgent need to recognize that the truth has been presented and then stand for that truth.

In recent years I have attended Gospel meetings where at the beginning of what was supposed to be the sermon a Bible text would be read and then for the next twenty minutes or so after dinner stories were presented, then another text at the end accompanied with an emotional tale designed not to leave a dry eye in the audience. Now, no error may have

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Overcoming Non-Contenders...



Editorial...

MORE ON PREACHING

Preaching the Gospel is a preacher's primary and principal function. Paul tells Timothy, as well as all preachers, "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*" (II Tim. 4:2). "*Paul... and Barnabas continued... teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also*" (Acts 15:35). Today, so many other things have often been added on their shoulders that is not the work of an evangelist.

What people often want to hear in preaching is not what they need. Children want all kinds of "things" but wise parents, acting from knowledge and experience, know better and instead, give them what they "need." Bible preaching is likewise a responsibility in supplying the "need" instead of the "want."

The Greek word translated preach is found 61 times in the New Testament and is translated: *preach, proclaim, publish*. Thayer's Greek/English lexicon says the word means: "to be a herald; to proclaim; always with the suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed." The preacher's message must not come from within himself but from a source beyond himself. His message comes from God — not by direct inspiration, but from the Holy Scriptures. When he speaks, he speaks not from the wisdom that man teaches, but from the Word of God. Paul wrote, "*...my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. ... Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual*" (I Cor. 2:4,13).

The preacher is to be "God's man" and preach "God's message." He listens and observes so that he might know what the need is and

then study and prepare himself to fill that need by preaching the whole counsel of God (cf. Acts 20:27). The Bible warns about some who "*...serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*" (Rom. 16:18). Far too many so-called preachers are ready to supply what people want to hear and what may be popular. But a true, faithful, Gospel preacher will not sell his soul in order to please the crowd. Instead, he will "*...speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*" and let no man despise him or his message (Titus 2:15). He will "*preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*" (II Tim. 4:2). That is the kind of preaching we need! Anything else will not save!

Too many listeners want their ears tickled and desire the preacher stay off the "issues of the day." The people during the time of Isaiah were like this, "*Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits*" (Isa. 30:10). The New Testament likewise tells of some who "*...will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" (II Tim. 4:3-4). Such foolishness may sound good, but is not that which will save the soul. The preacher must preach "*righteousness* (right living), *temperance* (self control) and *judgment to come*" (Acts 24:25).

Is this what you desire the preacher preach?

PREACHERS ARE TO BE SUPPORTED IN THEIR WORK

We are speaking here of faithful preachers; and, there are many of them. God only knows the number. Just because we may not see many of

them near us does not mean they are not "out there." It is so refreshing to cross paths with or otherwise learn of men who are doing the work of an evangelist, spending their lives serving the Lord, teaching the truth, raising a godly family, teaching the lost, edifying the saints, comforting the afflicted and many other good and scriptural ways he can be God's servant.

Gospel preachers are to be *encouraged*. Many suppose preaching is an easy task and many jokes have been made about it through the years. Any who joke about it ought to walk a mile in his shoes. So often, preachers receive very little encouragement in their work and are often not appreciated. In many ways, it's a lonely life. Church members often think of themselves, their families, working associates and friends in the community and at the same time classify the preacher in a category all by himself. They say, "there's the preacher and his family" as if they were aliens from outer space. Far too many times preachers are never accepted as one of the members of the local church — he's always a foreigner. During a difficult situation in the congregation where I once labored I was told, "you chose to be a preacher, you could have done something else." By which was meant, don't expect us to have sympathy for you, we're not going to stand by you, we have to live here, you can move any time, you're not permanent, we are. Preachers should be encouraged, not discouraged (Rom. 14:19; Acts 18:27; Phil. 2:1-4). It's a thankless job far too many times.

Gospel preachers are to be *defended* when they preach the Truth. Many stop their ears, refuse to listen and even sometimes persecute the very ones who tell them words whereby they may be saved (cf. Acts 11:14). Peter rebuked Simon in Acts 8:20-23 even as Paul rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:11. In both instances, Peter and Paul were doing their job as evangelists, though unpleasant as it may be. Faithful brethren will defend faithful preachers and hold up their hands when they preach the whole counsel of God and stand up for what the Bible teaches (cf. Acts 20:20,26,27). Some of the greatest encouragement I've ever received is when godly elders

stepped up in the pulpit following my preaching and commended the lesson and announced to the membership that what was spoken was the word of God. Elders have learned this cuts down on a lot of criticism they may otherwise receive.

Gospel preachers are to be supported through prayers. Paul often ask brethren to pray for him. *“Brethren, pray for us”* (I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1; Heb. 13:18). He wrote, *“that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”* (Rom. 15:30). *“Ye also helping together by prayer for us...”* (II Cor. 1:11). *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”* (Eph. 6:18-20). *“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanks-*

giving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:2-4). *“...I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you”* (Philemon 1:22). James 5:16 makes it plain that the *“...effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*

Gospel preachers are to be supported *financially*. Galatians 6:6 says, *“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.”* The word *“communicate”* means to *“share with others, distribute, be partaker.”* It means that those who hear the preaching are to share what they have (in material things) with those who preach. The same is stated in I Corinthians 9:14, *“...The Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”* This has been the principle throughout the Old and New Testaments alike. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote,

“I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service” (II Cor. 11:8). Paul said of himself and Barnabas, *“...have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things”* (I Cor. 9:6-11)? Faithful Gospel preachers should not have to beg and live as a benevolent case.

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been presented, but brethren, is it enough to just not preach error?

John said at II John 10, *“If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine.”* John did not say, if they don't preach error; but rather, if they fail to preach the truth, receive him not. You can mark it down, there is a difference in preaching truth and preaching THE TRUTH. There are a lot of sermons offered today that contain truth, but they also contain nothing that could not or would not be preached in any denominational church in town. Some how it seems many do not understand that it is not enough that one does not preach error; he must preach truth, all of it. Paul said that he did not fail to teach all that was needed to the Ephesian church nor did he fail to declare the whole counsel of God.

There is a danger in the church today much more subtle than outright false teaching. When someone clearly teaches false doctrine, we can deal with it, expose it and mark it for what it is. But what we are seeing today is a spirit *“of always be posi-*

tive, don't rock the boat or upset anybody.” We are exhorted to create a non-controversial image and be inoffensive, uplifting and affirming. The concept of preachers now being projected across our brotherhood makes them sound more like Dale Carnegie instructors than Gospel preachers. Topics run the gamut of *“Have a Positive Mental Attitude,” “How to Squander Money on Yourself,”* and *“How to Pamper yourself.”* And, God's people love to have it so.

There is no longer a desire to hear the truth, but rather going to church is to be a place where they can be entertained, where they can socialize and make business contacts and where their children can have a place to play. To many Christian parents, it is far more important that the congregation have a gymnasium and constant youth programs than it is for their children to hear the truth of God's word and learn the rigorous disciplines of a Christian life. Recreation is far more important to them than Bible study.

It seems that most parents believe that the only way to *“keep kids in church”* is to have constant, non-stop entertainment. The Bible talks about preachers and elders who

go along with such and calls them *“dumb dogs.”* *“His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter”* (Isa. 56:10-11).

Dumb Dogs! What a title, but worse yet, what a tragedy! Of what possible value can a watch dog be when danger is near and those in peril are not made aware of the danger?

At Ezekiel 33:7-9 God gave this instruction. *“...Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”* Notice some

things in this text.

God's spokesman was issued a "word" from the mouth of God. He was to use that word to warn the people of God. The word was, "wicked man you will die in your iniquity." The purpose was to bring the wicked man to repentance; to turn him from his way. If he failed to fulfill this responsibility, the blood of the wicked was on his hands, but if he delivered the message, the responsibility was then on the wicked man and he had delivered his soul. Isn't this the basic lesson of Jude 3?

Preachers and teachers have been given a word from the mouth of God. The faith has been once delivered and if any man speaks let him speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). We are to preach the word — reproving, rebuking and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine. We are to present the word so as to equip the saints so that they will not be tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, and it is accomplished by "speaking the truth in love" — contending for the faith, if you please. And, we present it as those who must give an account.

It is acknowledged that all do not have the same abilities. Not all evangelists are able to engage in public debate, while others may excel in it. Some are talented writers and can use their talents to teach the lost and edify brethren. Others are particularly talented in conducting meetings. Some may labor with small congregations all their lives, while still others preach to larger congregations with their unique challenges. Some are quite eloquent and others extremely blunt. Some are fully supported while others must make tents, but as long as they are preaching the word and contending for the faith, there is room in the kingdom for them.

This point is illustrated by two men from the Old Testament. They are *Obadiah* and *Elijah*. Obadiah was a faithful servant of God who hid and fed 100 prophets during Jezebel's slaughter of the prophets. He told Elijah, "I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth." But Obadiah was able to live as a servant of the most despicable king Israel ever produced. To be able to resist evil and be active in righteous works in that atmosphere is commendable.

Elijah too was a faithful servant of God. He enlisted Obadiah's help in carrying out the Lord's work and Obadiah assisted him. Old king Ahab then accused Elijah of causing strife. The Bible says that when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "...*Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim*" (I Kings 18:17-18). In reality, Ahab was the one at fault. And, you can mark it down; the one causing strife among God's people today is the sinner, not the one who convicts the sinner.

Now you can see the comparison I am sure. There are men who are faithfully, dutifully, serving God. They may be toiling in obscurity but they are accomplishing good for the Master. There are other men out in the forefront who are diligently, militantly defending the truth of God and they will not let the snide cutting remarks of compromisers silence them. Tactics of false teachers have not changed. They always attack the defender of truth and claim they are the ones causing trouble.

But the distressing aspect is the frequency with which false teachers are being defended. We hear, "I don't agree with his doctrine, but he is sincere and we ought not to be so critical, just look at all the good he has done." In contrast to such defenses, remember that Obadiah supported Elijah.

We are facing an urgent need for distinctive preaching on numerous issues today. Over in Nehemiah 8:8 it is said, "*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*" We need to tell some folks the "sense" of the commands concerning godliness so that they understand the reading.

Among those professing to be Christians, the prevalence of immodest dress and the justification of social drinking has risen to alarming rates. When churches hear preaching that excuses apparel revealing more of the body than it covers, and justifies drinking at moderate levels and tolerates unlawful marriages, why should we wonder at the result? Distinctive preaching will point people toward holiness and purity rather

than toleration for the worldly.

Part of the problem here is that many preachers are bowing before the altar of the idol of reputation. The preacher finds his ego stroked and his billfold lined as he preaches what the crowd wants to hear and is complimented about "how sweet it is." And, since he is not deemed as a troublemaker, he is viewed as being safe and sanitary for Gospel meetings and thus is in great demand. And, it is not all the fault of preachers. Members and elders share in the blame. Elders want to pack the pews and pay for their expensive building. Whenever there are itching ears to be found, there will be willing ticklers available.

In 1990, there appeared an article in the May issue of Newsweek which discussed the Church Growth Movement and what to look for in a minister. These experts did not judge a minister's success in faithfulness to the Gospel, but whether he could keep people coming and giving. That's the way secular employers rate their employees and salesmen. It also explains why much of the preaching has turned into performance. By those standards, Noah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were colossal failures, while Absalom would have been a success.

It seems many think that Christianity is the same thing as "getting-alongness." But we need to understand, Christianity invites controversy. We have reached a sorry pass when preachers are expected to have better manners than their Lord. I think about the old time preacher who was told, "Brother, you need to lighten up, your preaching rubs the cat the wrong way." To which the preacher responded, "Then turn the cat around!"

Sometimes kindness demands that we do things that would not be considered so kind in other circumstances. To knock a child down would seem unkind but not if it is to prevent him from being run over. We are told that the preacher should be politically correct and preach in view of the "changing times." It is said that when America was basically religious, that it was fine to preach about purity in doctrine and worship but that now such things are not acceptable. God's truth never has been acceptable to the carnal and

sinful, but we are still to preach it “in season and out.” We are to still earnestly contend for the faith.

Yes, when we preach the truth, when we earnestly contend for the faith, it is going to be offensive to some. Speaking the truth is offensive to those who are in error whether they be alien sinners or brethren in the Lord. Truth cuts because it is a two edged sword. Now a sword is intended to be used. There may be such a thing as a sword being used as decoration and worn only at some kind of a ceremony. But that is not true of the sword of the Spirit. It is not a decoration piece and it is not to be used as a butter knife, sweetly smoothing the bread of the wicked.

Jesus said, *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God”* (John 3:19-21). It doesn’t matter how dignified and genteel the preacher, the *liquor dealer* is still going to hate to hear the truth about alcohol, the *pornographer* will hate the truth about lust and the *fornicator* will hate those who expose the evil of illicit passions.

Preaching the word of God will be offensive to the denominational world as they hear the error of “faith only” exposed. Catholics will be offended as they hear their doctrine of Mariolatry exposed. And, those who would compromise God’s truth and embrace the errors of denominationalism while claiming to be members of the Lord’s church will be offended.

I think about a king in the Old Testament named Jehoshaphat. In many respects he was a good king. He professed to be a follower of the Lord but he forgot the principle of the righteous maintaining separation from the wicked. He caused his son to marry wicked king Ahab’s daughter and he made an alliance with Ahab to go and fight the Syrians. *“And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee*

from before the LORD” (II Chron. 19:2).

I have a question for these folks that participate in joint services with the denominations and exchange Bibles with people who have corrupted God’s pattern of worship and call denominational preachers “Brother” and join the ministerial associations, “Shouldest thou help the ungodly. And love them that hate the Lord?”

This means that sometimes God’s own children will get offended as “the faith” is contended for. That too is nothing new. All during the times of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, while there were faithful priests and prophets, there were also false priests and prophets. And, it was the task of God’s faithful ones to proclaim a message of condemnation, rebuke and damnation. Ezekiel was told in chapter three of his prophecy that he was to have a forehead harder than flint because he had to preach to a hard-headed people (vs.8-9). Preachers, don’t feel bad if you are sometimes accused of being hard-headed. You are in good company.

There is a reason for contending for the faith. God is a holy God. *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”* (Isa. 6:3). In God’s service we are to be a sanctified people. One of the names we wear is that of saint. *“Sanctify them in truth thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). *“...Even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”* (Eph. 5:25-26). God hates sin! *“Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way”* (Psalm 119:104). God doesn’t look any more favorable to sin among Christians than he does with pagans and sectarians.

It is no puzzle that the Pharisees were offended at Jesus’ teaching. They hated Jesus because they had taken on the characteristics of darkness. They hated the light of truth which he shed on their actions and doctrines and they did not want their hypocrisy exposed. When God’s people become caught up in sin and are impenitent, they are going to hate the truth too.

I would venture to say that every faithful preacher has had people say to him, “I don’t hate the truth, I just don’t like the way you present it.” It

is implied that there is a better way for the preaching to be done. Indirectly, they are making the suggestion that we are too harsh and hard or perhaps mean spirited; that we ought to be more loving or kind.

It doesn’t take much humility for any of us to admit that sometimes poor judgment is employed by preachers, this writer included. And, it further has to be admitted that the ranks of preachers are known to include a few hypocrites, ne’er-do-wells, inept and incompetent men that need to be tending store somewhere instead of preaching. But I strongly suspect that these kinds of flaws characterize the ranks of those who are offended as well as those who offend.

Frankly, I am more than a little bit tired of the moral superiority expressed by some of these liberal preachers who act like they have cornered the market on civility and kindness while at the same time they accuse those of us who condemn and expose error and contend for the faith as being “brotherhood watchdogs” and “buzzards who are looking for carrion.” And, they make their accusations in the sweetest tones!

I believe we would all agree it is wrong and yes even sinful to willfully, deliberately offend someone. We are told to *“maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3). *“Pursue peace with all men and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”* (Heb. 12:14). In presenting the truth, we need to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Yet even with the best of motives, the wisest of actions and the best choice of words, if we earnestly contend for the faith, we are going to offend some, both within and without the church.

To these folks who say that some of us are too plain and too offensive, let me ask you something. Since you claim to be preaching the same truth that we preach, but that we are faulty in our approach and you can do better, then why not get at it? Where are your public teachings that condemn adulterous marriages? Where are you declaring that there cannot be any fellowship with sin? Where are you when it comes to dealing with gambling and the lottery and social drinking. Where are you when it comes to discussions about

immodest dress?

Let's face some facts, instead of style, we need to recognize that a compromising spirit has affected many and they are actually objecting to the truth being taught. And, when it is taught they cry, "Peace, Peace when there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). But I am thankful there are still some people who have the attitude of Isaiah, "For Zion's sake, I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest" (Isa. 62:1).

Often in the Bible our role as Christians is portrayed as being soldiers in an army. This harmonizes with Jude's directive of contending for the faith. The Christian is to be a contender. This involves hardship. Still, we must endure hardship as a good soldier for Jesus Christ (II Tim. 2:3). We must endure inconvenience. Personal plans must be set aside to convey the Gospel.

There must be endurance of *criticism*. Remember our Lord was not exempt from criticism, neither were the apostles. There are some people who just simply do not like plain preaching of the truth. They will not endure sound doctrine. If a hearer does not have a love for the truth in his heart, you will never be able to present it so as to please him. He may give you lectures on *how* you should have said it when all the time it was not *how* you said it but *what* you said. Again, I would repeat something mentioned earlier. We are not to discount the importance of gracious words, seasoned with salt. And, it is never proper to deliberately seek to offend, but in contending for the faith, be prepared to endure unfair criticism.

In particular, preachers must be willing to suffer *financially*. Paul knew how to "abound" and to "suffer need." Notice that Paul wasn't always hungry. Sometimes he said he was full. Sometimes he abounded. But in either case he was able to carry on his work. Whether the brethren sent him enough to abound or he had to work with his hands making tents, he was willing to work night and day that the Gospel might be preached. Now all of us must live within our means. But, if a man does not know that he can earn more money in the world of secular business, given his education and experi-

ence in dealing with people, than he can as a preacher of the Gospel, then he probably is not bright enough to preach anyhow!

If you genuinely contend for the faith, you are going to suffer *discouragement*. Sometimes we can preach and teach for months and see very few, if any, obey the Gospel. Ungodly attitudes and practices in the lives of many remain unchanged. It is easy for us to seek Elijah's cave and have a genuine pity party (cf. I Kings 19). Or perhaps be like Jeremiah who grew weary of preaching to people who would not pay any attention to what he said (cf. Jer. 9; 20). Yet, the Lord sustained Elijah and Jeremiah had that fire "shut up in his bones" so that he could not refrain from speaking. God will take care of us too.

Yes, I have been in the valley of discouragement. I have seen people who have heard enough Gospel to change the world and yet they remain in their sins. I have been prompted to reexamine the content of my preaching and ask, "Lord is it I?" "Am I just not cut out for this work?" Thank God, though, I have had my wife or a godly elder or close personal friend jar me back to the reality of the fact that we can only plant and water but God gives the increase (I Cor. 3:6-7). To you preachers and elders and Bible class teachers may I say just now, keep on planting and watering and leave the rest of it to the Lord and to the hearts of those who hear. It is going to be worth it! Paul said, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Remember too, that he added that these hardships are only temporary and "light afflictions" when they are weighed in the scales of eternity.

It is said that many years ago when Robert Ingersoll was traveling the country delivering his lectures of infidelity, an astounding event occurred. Ingersoll was addressing an audience that had filled a great auditorium to capacity. That night Ingersoll was more antagonistic toward Christianity than he usually was in his speeches. With great eloquence and power he derided and belittled any who would embrace a faith in Christ. When he concluded he asked if there was any one who

cared to reply to what he had said and take issue. It was so quiet you could have heard that proverbial pen drop. Then a little girl far up in the balcony stood up and begin to sing, "Stand up stand up for Jesus ye soldiers of the cross. Lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss." All over the auditorium others began to rise and join her in song. Ingersoll left the stage dismayed and defeated. So soldiers of Christ arise! Take your stand for faith, earnestly contend for it. The strife shall not be long. This day the noise of battle, the next the victors' song. To him that overcometh, a crown of life shall be; he with the King of glory shall live eternally.

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LEARNING VALUABLE LESSONS FROM ONE WHO LOST HIS SOUL

Marvin L. Weir

*The prayers and wishes of the lost will avail nothing for themselves or others.
Those who do not value prayer in this life will find that prayer
has no value for them in the life to come.*

The story is found in Luke 16:19-31. The “rich man” had to wake up in eternity before his eyes were opened to the truth. He has now suddenly become an expert on living a wasted life and realizes that “no man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). The love of riches, the cares of this world, and the pleasures of sin will choke one’s soul to death. If the love of God does not master us, the love of this world will.

The ungodly always seek to justify themselves in the sight of men. They should remember that God knows their hearts and that those things exalted among men are “an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:14-15). The inspired words recorded about “a certain rich man” and “a certain beggar named Lazarus” (Luke 16:19-20) contains valuable lessons for those who will hear.

One may impress men and live like a king in the sight of men, and yet be utterly corrupt in the sight of God! The “purple and fine linen” (v.19) that make up man’s righteousness and turns heads in this world was of no comfort to the rich man in eternity. Multitudes who selfishly live only for themselves and think they have need of nothing, are in reality “the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17). We need to learn that men may be impressed with many things that do not impress God.

One may be poor and loathsome in the eyes of his neighbor, and yet be rich and beautiful in the sight of God. Lazarus was placed at the rich man’s “gate, full of sores,” and desired only “to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table” (vs.20-21). There is no doubt but that the beggar was a disgusting sight to many as

the dogs “came and licked his sores” (v.21). God, however, has always been impressed with one’s heart and not his outward appearance (I Sam. 16:7). Even though Lazarus was considered to be worthless in the sight of men, he was a precious jewel in the sight of God.

A man may have a pompous funeral but be a miserable soul! It is a common thing for men to eulogize the past of the departed rich and famous, but what about their present? Yes, the rich man died and in all probability was given a magnificent funeral, but “in hades he lifted up his eyes, beings in torments” (v.23). It is surely the case that not many mourned the death of Lazarus, yet “he was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (v.22).

One may have abundance of this world’s goods but in the world to come be utterly destitute. Most people measure success by what they accomplish in this life. The problem is that God does not use the same measuring stick that man uses. One may be a tremendous success according to the world’s standard but only a miserable failure in the sight of God. Having no needs or cares in this life is no evidence that one’s soul is right with God. The everlasting thirst for only a drop of water will be a terrible torment for one who never knew what it is like to be thirsty (v.24).

If one neglects his opportunities in this life, he will have an eternity to remember his folly. One’s memory will be the greatest of tormentors throughout eternity. A person who has lived his life only for the gratification of his own selfish desires will have an eternity to reflect on his mistake. In hades the rich man begged for mercy, but such request was too late (v.24). The answer of Abraham

was something that the rich man would play over again and again in his mind. Abraham said, “Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted, and thou art tormented” (v.25).

The righteous and unrighteous live together in this world, but a day is coming when they will be eternally separated. People grow quite fond of earthly relationships in this world. Earthly relationships will mean nothing, however, when the great gulf is fixed (v.26). The only thing that will matter then is our relationship with God and Christ. In this world, people can choose to do as they please. It is necessary for the righteous and the unrighteous to cross paths as they travel through this life. There is, however, a day coming when the words of the Savior will be vividly recalled. Christ warned, “Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matt. 13:30).

The prayers and wishes of the lost will avail nothing for themselves or others. Those who do not value prayer in this life will find that prayer has no value for them in the life to come. All will have a change of heart or mind in the Day of Judgment. But alas, it will be too late (vs.24,27-28)!

The lessons are yours to learn while it is yet today!

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SEEK THE OLD PATHS

have been members of the church for over 50 years after studying our way out of the Baptist Church we were raised up in. After we were baptized, my brother-in-law (a Baptist deacon) visited and I said, 'we are not Baptists anymore. We are church of Christ.' He said, 'oh that's that church that doesn't believe in music.' I said, 'yes, we believe in music, the way the Bible tells us' and explained it. He said, 'well that verse in the Bible where David played music in the temple is good enough for me for David was a man after God's own heart.' I said, 'well, David committed adultery too. Do you think its all right for us to do that too?' He never talked to us about the Bible again" **...Irwin & Mildred Barger, Benton, AR.** "Enclosed is a small check for *Seek The Old Paths* work. Thanks for the encouragement you give as you are my only contact with the Lord's church. Our small body of sheep struggled to stay afloat for years here only to be split by a young preacher. He is no longer here but the sheep have been scattered. I know the gates of hell will not prevail against the Lord's church and pray unceasingly that the church may be restored here. Keep up your great work for the Master" **...Butler, PA.** "I have been receiving your publication for several years and I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate it very much as well as your dedication to the Truth. Please use the small contribution in your efforts to spread the pure word. Thank you" **...Timothy W. Benson, Notasulga, AL.** "I enjoy STOP very much. The articles you publish are like the sermons I heard many years ago" **...Corrine Young, Columbia, MO.** "I am sending a small amount to help in the publishing of the paper and for postage, but use it any way you see fit" **...Nannie Philpot, Wartrace, TN.** "Dear fellow Christians, I appreciate your bulletin. It has the meat of the word" **...Elvie Coffman, Avondale, AZ.** "Dub Mowery's, *The Ultimate Need in the Brotherhood* (June 2007) was well-written and sorely needed today" **...Kenny Westmoreland, Celina, TN.** "Will you please remove our name from your mailing list? We have made the decision to cancel most subscriptions. Thank you" **...Trevlyn Kelly, Abilene, TX.** "A friend loaned me one of your papers *Seek The Old Paths*. I sure liked it. Would you please put me on your mailing list? Thank you" **...Betty Riddle, St. Clair Shores, MI.** "Thanks, I am delighted to know of you. We need more folks staying the course instead of trying to fill buildings. I would like the article on musical instruments. Heard of it, haven't seen it" **...David C. Raines, Flowery Branch, GA.** [NOTE: We have done several issues on Instrumental Music. You can find them at www.seektheoldpaths.com. Look for the Feb., March, April and July 2007 issues.] "Thanks to brother Highers and the elders at Getwell for giving permission to run his article from the April 2007 issue of the *Spiritual Sword* on Instrumental Music, and thanks to you for doing so" **...John Grubb, Duluth, GA.** "Please send me STOP. I enjoy reading this. It would be nice to receive it every month. Thank you" **...Reba Simpson, Lake Park, GA.** "Just got and read the July 2007 STOP. Powerful article by Bro. Highers. Keep up the good and godly work" **...Melvin Harper, La Junta, CO.** "I really appreciate the article by brother Highers in the July issue. False teachers like Atchley are leading a lot of people to hell. As the article said he is a very powerful persuasive speaker. We are fortunate to have people like brother Highers that can and will counter them. I really don't know why Mr. Atchley thought he had to offer a defense for his decision to use instruments in worship, when he said the Holy Spirit had spoken to him, that threw out all scripture. I know this was not the focus of the article but any time any one says the Holy Spirit spoke to them he needs to prove it, which of course he can't. Thanks" **...Danny Lewis, Livingston, TN.** "I like it very much. Thank you" **...James Smith, Torrance, CA.** "Please take me off your mailing list. Keep up the good work" **...Rhoda Doss, Warrior, AL.** "Thank you" **...Nathan & Katy Franson, Memphis, TN.** "Just finished reading the issue featuring Alan Highers response. Outstanding!! Thank you" **...Chuck Newell, Gnadenhutten, OH.** "Keep up the good work" **...Bob Price, Jacksonville, FL.** "I certainly continue to appreciate your

"For His work, in His name" **...Ruth Shandor, Death Valley, CA.** "We appreciate so much what you are doing. Please keep up the good work" **...Bill Gower, Magnolia, AR.** "Please send 10 each of May and June 2007. We enjoy your paper very much. We don't know where you got our name but sure do appreciate who ever it was. We

efforts with STOP. These articles are what we need to be made aware of" **...Dan Huffins, Gainesboro, TN.** "Would you tell Bro. Highers thanks for the work he does for the church. I just wish he would do more. I became a member of the church in the early 60s. He had a radio program when he was at Getwell. A lot of us learn a lot about the Bible from him. I know I did. But we had good teachers and preachers back then and that helped. Thank you for your help. I think STOP is very good. Please send me 50 copies of the July 2007 paper. Best I have heard in a long time. I will be glad to pay whatever it cost. I wish it could be put in a book" **...Russell Scaife, West Helena, AR.** "Please enter a subscription and include the back issues for 2007. I have enclosed a donation to the cause" **...T. W. Sutterfield, Indianapolis, IN.** "I have enjoyed and profited greatly from the articles in *Seek The Old Paths*. A copy of each edition of your publication is given to every family at Powell Grove. I consider it a great way to edify the members. I ask them to pass it on to others after they have read every article. To deny that many congregations are appealing to fleshly desires and feel good religion is but to bury our heads in the sands of ignorance. The change agents are stealing the church right under the very noses of many preachers and elders. Many congregations are no longer walking by faith but by sight. Emotionalism has replaced the Lord's command to go into all the world and preach the gospel, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord commanded the apostles. Once again, God's people are being destroyed for a lack of knowledge. Many today do not know and others simply do not care. But this I know, there will yet be some faithful when the Lord returns, because of what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (I Thess. 4:17). So, I remain the eternal optimist because many are still believing and obeying the gospel" **...Lloyd Gale, Lebanon, TN.**

Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the **East End Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is mailed **FREE** upon request. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless otherwise noted. Articles are also welcomed.

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<http://www.seektheoldpaths.org>

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