

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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DO WE WANT A CHURCH THAT FLIES?

Tom Wacaster

A rather interesting article appeared in one of the more liberal periodicals sometime back that, of late, has been parroted by the change-agents of this new century. The author's comments serve as a good example of the present effort on the part of change-agents to remodel and restructure the Lord's church of our generation into something that is "functional," though not necessarily in accord with the "form" of the New Testament pattern. The author of that article draws a parallel between the progress in aviation and the supposed progress now being offered the brotherhood. He argues that our first attempts at flight failed because we sought to "imitate" the birds rather than develop the principle of flight. In like manner, he argues, we [those who would demand a 'thus saith the Lord'] have sought to imitate the first century church rather than build a church that is functional. He writes:

Like the ornithopterists of old, we assumed that 'function' was inextricably bound to 'form', that to fly with the first century church required us to fly like it. In our minds, a restoration of the first century spirit and dynamic would only be possible when we gave the modern church the same 'equipment' as its ancient counterpart...Many of us are growing frustrated with a modern church that may look like the ancient church in the particulars but fails to function with anything like its power and

life-changing dynamic.

Let us take a close look at our misguided brother's plea.

First, *functionality and form cannot be separated when it comes to divine and holy matters*. God so decreed that to be the case. In short, when God designed the church, He designed it to function according to His purpose, and with "his good pleasure" in mind (Eph. 1:5). It makes no difference what generation we may live in or what culture might surround us, truth remains truth and no man can add or successfully altar God's form without incurring God's wrath and displeasure. The problem with the author who wrote the article to which I refer is that he seems to think that we can somehow superimpose culture on God's design and make whatever changes are necessary to make the church more functional. One author addressed this pitiful way of thinking:

Because our postmodern culture has little respect for God's timeless wisdom, it recreates its own beliefs and morals after its preferences. The postmodern mindset, rejecting the foundation of the past to empower the impulses of the present, imagines it has something better to offer than God's Word. Postmodernists loathe the judgmental and exclusive character of Christianity. They can accept the kindness and grace of Savior Jesus but will not tolerate the authoritative teaching of the Lord Jesus. They do not believe in a univer-

sal moral law controlling lives; they would rather create their own moral rules. In their minds, the Bible is too far removed from our time and place to have any relevance or application to us today (Phil Sanders, *A Faith Built on Sand*, page 34).

We need to remind ourselves that Galatians 1:8-9, Revelation 22:18-19 and 1 Corinthians 4:6 are still in the Bible. All who trifle with the God-given pattern will answer to Jesus on the judgment day.

Second, *functionality is not to be defined by men*. I find it interesting that the change-agents have no clear definition of where they want to take the church. This is because they do not know themselves where they want to go. Many of them are like the pilot who told his passengers, "We are casting off the compass, and throwing out the radio, but we can rejoice in knowing that all engines are running and it is full speed ahead." The Bible provides a clear cut pattern for the church, both in its identity and its purpose. Yes, there are minute details as to what the church should look like, but there are also plain and positive passages as to her purpose and how that purpose is to be accomplished.

If I read my Bible clear, we are to: 1) preach and teach the lost, 2) build up and edify the body of Christ, and 3) provide assistance to those in need as the opportunity arises. God

(Continued on page 87)

A Church That Flies...



Editorial...

THE CHURCH ASSEMBLES FOR WORSHIP

Garland M. Robinson

No clearer passage in all the Bible can be found than what we read in Hebrews 10:24-31. It is an address to members of the church. Verse 25 reads, “*Not forsaking the **assembling** of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*” On whatever occasion we forsake the assembling of the church, we have abandoned, deserted, neglected, left helpless and in straits that assembling of the church. “*For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins*” (v.26); and, “[*it is*] a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v.31).

We must remember that members of the church have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb (cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19). It therefore is a grand privilege and honor to worship God and pay homage to His high and holy name. Where else would we possibly desire to be than in worship with the saints on the Lord’s Day and every other assembling of the body?

When we obey the Gospel, are we left to ourselves to stumble through life, finding our own spiritual way? No, not at all! There are others just like us. Many others have also been redeemed. We receive strength and help from one another. Yea, we are even commanded to do so. “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Heb. 10:24). One of the times and places in which this is done is during the regular assemblies of the church.

Christians in every geographical area make up the church collectively at that place. Therefore we read of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), Philippi (Phil. 1:1), Rome (Rom. 1:7), Colosse (Col. 1:2), Ephesus (Eph. 1:1; Rev. 2:1), Smyrna (Rev. 2:8), Pergamos (Rev. 2:12), Thyatira (Rev. 2:18), Sardis (Rev. 3:1), Philadelphia

(Rev. 3:7), Laodicea (Rev. 3:14), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1), Caesarea (Acts 18:22), Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), Jerusalem (Acts 11:22) and Antioch (Acts 13:1). There were churches scattered throughout all Judaea, Galilee, Samaria (Acts 9:31) and Galatia (Gal. 1:2). Churches often met in the homes of brethren. They did so in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), Nymphas (Col. 4:15) and Philemon (Philemon 1:1-2).

The church gathers themselves together at a specific location (Acts 14:27; 4:31; 20:7-8; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26; Heb. 10:25). Call it a tradition or custom if you will, but it is a tradition/custom ordained of God. How else would they know to do such? Exhortation is offered again and again for the church to assemble. Paul sought to join himself to the church at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:26). Why? It wasn’t because it was a place of recreation and social events. It was a place to collectively worship and fellowship with God and saints of “like precious faith.” It was to do that which had been revealed by the Holy Spirit. It was a tradition ordained by the apostles (1 Cor. 11:18; 14:23). There are traditions of men, they are condemned (Col. 2:8); and, there are traditions of God, they are commanded for Christians, the church, to keep (2 Thess. 3:6).

The New Testament reveals *specific acts* in which the church is to engage in their assemblies. These are not of men. They are of God. They are not optional, no matter how many rant and rave to the contrary. What are the customs and traditions of God regarding worship? The church assembled on the first day of the week for God-ordained worship:

1) **Parking of the Lord’s supper.** Sometimes we hear brethren say the Lord’s supper is to remember the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. But this is NOT SO. The

Lord’s supper is a memorial of the suffering and death of Christ — the blood and body of Christ. “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*” (1 Cor. 10:16)? The Lord’s burial and resurrection is not included in the Lord’s supper. As important as His burial and resurrection is, even essential to salvation, they are not a part of the communion. The focus is upon the suffering and death of our Lord — the sacrifice He made for us.

The Lord’s supper is eaten in the assembly — when the church assembles for that purpose (Acts 20:7). It is a solemn occasion. A most serious time of reflection. In the supper, we show the Lord’s death till He comes (1 Cor. 11:23-29). It is observed upon the first day of every week (Acts 20:7). There is no authority to relegate it to funerals and weddings or any other day or event of the week. To do so makes sacrilege of it!

2) **A free-will offering (collection) is given.** Like the Lord’s supper, it is also done upon the first day of the week. The Holy Spirit, through Paul, said, “*Upon the first [day] of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as [God] hath prospered him...*” (1 Cor. 16:2). This is not an option. It is done from the heart with a deliberate financial contribution made by each member. This collection is for the work of the church, which is: 1) *evangelism* (preaching and teaching the Gospel locally and around the world, Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 10:42; 11:26; 13:46,47; 28:28; Rom. 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11,12), 2) *edification* (instruction, learning, guidance) of the church/ members (Acts 14:21, 22; 15:35; 1 Cor. 14:5, 12, 26; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 4:12, 16, 29; 1 Thess. 5:11), 3) *benevolence* (helping those who are in need of this world’s goods, Acts 2:44, 45, 46; 4:32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37; 6:1,2,3; 11:29, 30; Rom. 15:25, 26, 27; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2, 3; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:1-15; 1 Tim. 5:16; 6:18).

We must remember that God receives glory *in and by and through* the church (Eph. 3:21). He is not glorified through civic organizations, good-will kitchens or any other benevolent society instituted and and/or organized by men.

3) **Preaching the Gospel is a**

part of the worship assembly. It is the instructional part of worship — each one hearing and learning God’s word. Paul preached to the church at Troas (Acts 20:7). He preached to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:6,7,8,9); and, he would do so at Rome when he had the opportunity (Rom. 1:15). Preaching the Gospel is the means by which God has chosen to save those who believe and obey (1 Cor. 1:18,19,20,21). Without preaching, no man can be saved. Therefore, evangelists are to “*preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2). Timothy was told: “*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee*” (1 Tim. 4:16).

4) Prayer is an essential part of worship. When Peter was in prison, “...*prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him*” (Acts 12:5). Paul requested the church at Ephesus to pray for him. “*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. 6:18,19,20). The church at Thessalonica was exhorted to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17). Praying is done both individually and collectively. God speaks to us through His word. We speak to God through prayer. We can pray at any time and at any place, but most certainly in worship upon the first day of the week.

5) Singing is an essential part of worship. While singing is authorized to be done at any time, it is certainly authorized to be done in the assembly of the church as well. Hebrews 2:12 reads, “...*in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*” Part of the instruction given the church at Ephesus involved singing. “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Eph. 5:19). The phrase “speaking to yourselves” involves more than one person. It is

collective, congregational, action. When the church assembles, they are to sing. They sing one to another. Colossians 3:16 says the same thing. “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*” Singing teaches (instructs) and admonishes (warns, exhorts) those present. All present are involved. Though men often include mechanical instruments with their singing, they do so to their own peril because they are without the authority of God. For instruments to be acceptable to God, they must be authorized (Col. 3:17). But, no verse can be offered which authorizes them! Men use them because they like them, not because God commanded them. It will be a sad sad day in judgment for those who go beyond that which is written and include in worship things not authorized by God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11).

Far too many run full steam ahead in violation of Hebrews 10:25 and never become a part of the local church. They seek to be Christians “at large.” They don’t want to accept responsibility. They desire the freedom to worship God as they please. They do not believe there is such a thing as a “worship service.” They laugh and scorn collective worship. They desire to worship at home or on the road, at the lake or more than likely, not at all. They suppose worship is a 24/7 affair — that all you do in life is worship. They have failed to do their study. They don’t want God’s way, so they go about to establish their own way.

God-ordained worship on the Lord’s day in *singing, praying, giving, preaching* and the *Lord’s supper* is done at a specific place and time when the whole church is gathered together (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20; 14:23). All of life is not worship. Abraham went to a specific place to worship (Gen. 22:5). Elkanah went yearly to Jerusalem to worship (1 Sam. 1:3). Paul went to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11). On the first day of the week, saints assemble with the church for collective worship. They do so by the approved example of the first century church. Where are you on the Lord’s Day?

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There was division in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). Heaven’s answer to division is found in verse 10, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” Five distinct admonitions in this verse, when followed, bring unity and condemn division. In light of this, how can anyone be thankful for and promote division?

— Editor

Elder's COLUMN

WHERE ARE ALL THE TEACHERS?

Roger D. Campbell

Those Christians that taught the word of God in the first century played an important role in the work of the church. Some may have taught in one location while others taught as they traveled from place to place. Some, no doubt, taught constantly week after week and year after year, while perhaps others taught with less frequency.

In the 21st century, the church still needs its members to teach the word! We need to go out and take God's word "into the streets and lanes of the city...into the highways and hedges, and compel" folks to repent and accept the Lord's invitation (Luke 14:21,23). We need saints of God to teach their family members about the Christ as Andrew did (John 1:40-42). We need dads and moms teaching in the home, instructing their precious kids in the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

There is also a great need today, as in every generation, for Bible class teachers. Inasmuch as the Holy Spirit has not designated in the Bible how often, where, and in what manner the saints of God must be together in Bible class arrangements, those questions all fall into the realm of judgment, with the leadership of each congregation determining what it deems will work most effectively for the local flock on the first day of the week or at any other time.

In order to have Bible classes, you must have students. Without students, there are no classes. In the same way, Bible classes also stand in need of someone to teach them. We need teachers in the classroom that faithfully teach and live the message of the Bible (1 Tim. 4:16). Some of the church's most capable folks do not do much teaching. Thus, I ask, "Where are all the teachers?" Where are those faithful saints that are needed to teach new converts, young married couples, college-aged saints, teenagers, and kids all the way down to the infants? I recognize that not every member of the church is cut out

to teach a class, and I also understand that some members are not yet spiritually mature enough to be given the responsibility to teach, but in many local churches, that still leaves several qualified people to teach. Where are they? Why is it that they do not teach?

There are too many who make excuses for not teaching.

"I've done my share of teaching. It's time to let somebody else do it." There is such a thing as "teacher burnout." Sometimes folks just need a break from teaching. There are some great workers that have been in the classroom for decades. Their influence on the Kingdom and the population of heaven will not be fully known or appreciated until we meet on that other shore. But, at the same time, what if every person took the approach of "Let somebody else do it?" Not much would be done, would it? Besides, in our congregation's directory, there is no brother or sister with the name "Somebody Else."

"I would volunteer to teach, but I know how that works around here. Once you start teaching, you will never get anybody to take your place, so you are stuck with the teaching job for life." Consider this possibility: approach the deacon or shepherd that works with the Bible class/educational program and volunteer to teach for a specified period of time, say three or six months, with the understanding that you are doing this only on a temporary basis. If you fear there might be a misunderstanding, write out your offer/proposal and sign your name. At the same time, especially where young children are involved, it often makes for a more stable classroom setting when a teacher can work with the same group for a bit longer period of time. Surely there are some arrangements we can come up with that get effective teachers into the classroom and at the same time keep them from getting burned out.

"I am just too busy right now to take on a teaching responsibility." Without doubt, some circumstances at

home or at work, or both, make it taxing to teach a weekly class. Yet, at the same time, how long have you been saying you are too busy to teach? Has it been six months? Three years? Seven years? Brothers and sisters, our Lord expects us to use our talents, and He can only increase our abilities when we use them! Some have the reputation of being good teachers, but they must have gained such years ago because they sure do not do any teaching these days. For some, the time factor may be a legitimate cause for not teaching on a temporary basis, but for others there is a good chance it is a sorry excuse for failing to do what they ought to do (James 4:17). While we use our excuse of "I'm just too busy," humanistic teachers have plenty of time to pound evolution into the brains of our kids, TV producers have oodles of time to portray violence and nakedness as "normal," and denominational zealots make ample time to spread the devil's falsehoods. But, hey, it's just our young people and the souls of God's people that we do not have enough time for. How serious could that be?!

There is no biblical demand that says a congregation *must* divide into Bible classes by age groups. That decision, by the authority of the Lord (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Peter 3:18), is left to each local congregation. However, we see the advantage in many cases of doing so, but it would be just as scriptural to have everyone study in one room. Yet, would it not be sad if the leaders of a local church were forced to make such a decision because no one was willing to teach separate classes?

Bible classes play a huge role in determining where a congregation will be five or even twenty-five years down the road. You believe that, too, don't you? Where are all the teachers?

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TAKING THE WORD OF GOD TO ISLAM #3

John Hall

CONFLICTS IN DOCTRINE BETWEEN THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE

I. Regarding the Person of Jesus:

Koran: Describes Jesus as:

1. An unauthorized “partner” not to be given God (3:64, 25:2).
2. Never accepting nor had the right to accept worship (5:116-117).
3. Not the “Son” of God (18:1-5). In fact, God Himself denies that Jesus is His Son (9:30-31).
4. Not possessing the traits of deity (23:91).
5. An impossibility since God had no partner or “wife” with whom to have a child (6:102-103).
6. No more than an “apostle” or “prophet” (5:75). Specifically, He is no greater than Abraham, Ishmael, or Jacob (2:136; 3:84).
7. Having been born of a virgin birth (21:91) while also having been created by God of the dust just like Adam (3:59).
8. Capable of being destroyed by God should He have so chosen (5:17).
9. Not having actually been crucified (4:157).
10. Having called his disciples “Muslims” (3:52).
11. Having prophesied of Mohammed (61:6).
12. His purpose in coming was to prepare the way of Mohammed (61:6).

Interesting notes also recorded in the Koran regarding Jesus:

1. Muslims are instructed to obey His words (43:63).
2. He performed miracles on earth (3:45-49; 5:110; 113).
3. Never tasted of death but was taken by God (3:55; 4:158).
4. He was faultless (19:19).

Bible: Describes Jesus as:

1. Having perfect unity, fellowship and communion with the Father (John 17:21-22).
2. Accepting worship (Matt. 2:2,11; 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:8).
3. Being the Son of God (Matt. 8:29;

John 1:34; 1 John 2:22-23). The Father declared such Himself (Matt. 2:15; 3:17; 17:5).

4. Equal with God (Isa. 9:6-7; John 1:1; 5:18; 10:30,38; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 2:9; Rev. 1:8-9).
5. His birth on earth resulting from a supernatural process that could not involve God having something He cannot have as a Spirit (Matt. 1:18-20; Mark 12:25).
6. A Prophet and an Apostle (Deut. 18:15; Heb. 3:1) but greater than any other prophet or apostle (Matt. 3:11; Luke 7:28; Matt. 17:4-5; Luke 11:31-32; John 4:12-14; 8:53,58; 13:14-16).
7. Being “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), not of the dust like Adam (Rom. 5:12-19).
8. The beginning and end (Rev. 1:8) or part of the eternal plan of God (Eph. 3:11).
9. Crucified and resurrected (Matt. 27:35; 1 Cor. 15:3-4).
10. Having called some of His disciples “apostles” (Luke 6:12-13) and later all of His disciples were called “Christians” (Acts 11:26).
11. Being the culmination of the last system that communicates the message of God to man (Heb. 1:1-2; John 16:12-13).
12. Coming to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10) and having had *His* way prepared by John (Matt. 3:3) He *became* the Way (John 14:6).

CONFLICTS IN DOCTRINE BETWEEN ISLAMIC HADITH AND THE BIBLE

I. The Person of Jesus

Hadith: Jesus will:

1. Return, die, and be resurrected (Surah 19:33-34).
2. Restore Islam and wipe out Christianity and Judaism (3:425).
3. Then judge the world by the Koran and *not* the Gospel (4:658).
4. Only reward those who believe in Him *and* Mohammed (4:655).
5. Not intercede for man as

Mohammed will (8:570).

Bible: Jesus has:

1. Already died once and for all time (Heb. 10:10). Falling away from the truth is the spiritual equivalent of crucifying Him again (Heb. 6:6).
2. Already ended the Jewish system (Matt. 23:37; Rom. 2:28-29; Heb. 7:12) and did not speak of another system following Christianity (Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 12:31-32).
3. Stated He will judge the world according to His words (John 12:48) in the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-8).
4. Had salvation placed *only* in His name (Acts 4:12).
5. Alone been given the responsibility of interceding between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:34).

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God hates those who sow discord and division (cf. Proverbs 6:16-19). Romans 16:17-18 says, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (innocent). Are you involved in causing division?

The word “mark” means “to fix one’s eyes upon, direct one’s attention to, pay attention to, keep one’s attention on, be concerned about, watch out for, be careful.” The word is used both in a good sense (cf. Philippians 3:17) and a bad sense (cf. Romans 16:17). The context determines whether the ones we are to “mark” are to be followed or avoided. But in Romans 16:17, the reason we keep our eyes on these individuals is so we will not follow their wicked and divisive ways. Division is contrary to God’s Will. It is the opposite of the Lord’s Way and Christian character.

— Editor

For Deeper Study...

LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU

Stephen Wiggins

In Ephesians 5:6 Paul says, “*Let no man deceive you with empty words...*” (ASV, “vain” KJV). Vain words are empty words. An analysis of this statement is helpful for those who take seriously the solemn warnings of God.

EMPTY WORDS

The apostle uses the adjective “empty” to describe the kind of words by which one may be deceived. The term literally refers to someone or something possessing no material substance such as an empty cistern or one sent away empty handed (LXX, Gen. 31:42; 37:24). There exists, however, a figurative extension of this meaning in the New Testament. In this sense it pertains to someone or something lacking intellectual, moral or spiritual merit. For example, the “vain” (“foolish” NKJV) man supposes faith saves in the absence of works (James 2:20). Also, without the reality of Christ’s resurrection, Paul views his preaching as “vain” and his converts as possessing worthless faith of the same sort (1 Cor. 15:14). When Paul uses the term with reference to the message of false teachers it carries the idea of *without content, without any basis, or without truth*. It describes words lacking in beneficial substance, *untrue words* (BDAG, 539; Louw/Nida, 674). Other sources offer the definition as “words which convey erroneous teachings” or as words “devoid of truth” (Vine, 198; Thayer, 343).

Grammatically, the noun “words” is in the *dative case*. This case usage indicates the means by which the action of the verb is carried out (Brooks/Winebery, 42). It is necessary for translators to supply the terms “with” or “by means of” to express this instrumentality involved with the indirect object. The construction answers the question “how?” Christians may be deceptively led astray from the truth by false teachers. And, just *how* do heretics achieve this accomplishment? Answer: through

the instrumentality of *words* used to convey something other than biblical truth. Words are vehicles of concepts. They are the primary means by which persons communicate ideas to others. God discloses His truth to humanity through verbally inspired words which we have embodied in written form on the pages of the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16). Faithful preachers disseminate this truth to saint and sinner alike through the proclamation of words which convey the divine will. These words are characterized as “*the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68); “*sound words*” (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13), or “*the words of the faith*” (1 Tim. 4:6). False teachers likewise have at their disposal the means by which to dispense their heretical views. It is through “*words of flattery*” (1 Thess. 2:5), “*feigned words*” and “*great swelling words of vanity*” (2 Peter 2:3,18; cf. Jude 16) or the “*empty words*” of our text. It is through the instrumentality of these *words devoid of truth* which become the medium of deception when spoken by advocates of error.

DECEPTION

The word translated “deceive” (Eph. 5:6) can describe the one who *misleads* himself when failing to control his tongue, resulting in the practice of vain religion (James. 1:26). Self deception is possible (1 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 6:3). It is also possible to be deceived by others. Paul uses an intensified form of the term to describe the enticement utilized by Satan to seduce Eve in the Garden of Eden (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). The apostle employs the term again to depict the mode of operation by false teachers when using “smooth and fair speech” in order to “*beguile* the hearts of the simple [innocent]” (Rom. 16:17-18). Thus, the divine mandate is to “let no man *beguile* you in any wise” (2 Thess. 2:3). The term relates the concept of causing someone to accept false ideas or erroneous views con-

cerning the truth, to *deceive* or *cheat* (BDAG, 345; Louw/Nida, 367). In every age it is inevitable that false teachers will surface to delude the Lord’s church and lead believers astray from the purity of the Gospel and its ethical demands on their lives (Arnold, 326). Know that at times, words may seem clever and plausible from a preacher who seems trustworthy, but in reality are the very means by which one is led to their spiritual ruin.

THE IMPERATIVE

The phrase “let no man deceive” translates a present active imperative preceded by the negative pronoun “no one” or “not any person” (*medeis*). The negative is used prior to the imperative to turn the command into a prohibition - a negative command. Such a construction is often referred to as a “prohibitive imperative” because the command forbids a certain action. The most forceful way to express a command or prohibition in Greek is to place the directive in the imperative mood. But if this statement is a command, why is the word *let* used in the translation? This sounds to the English reader as if Paul were politely encouraging the saints not to be deceived rather than issuing an order to be obeyed. In the art of translation it is a generally accepted view that the source language (i.e., *Greek*) of any document will always contain more than can ever be fully conveyed in the target language (i.e., *English*). In other words, something is usually “lost in translation” like some of the more subtle nuances which defy transference from one language to another (Towner, 7). This is the case here of which the expositor has the responsibility to explain the significance of the underlying Greek form (Wallace, 486).

The reason why the English rendering does not fully reflect the force of an imperative here is because grammatically it is a third person

singular, for which there is no English equivalent. Since the third person imperative form does not occur in English, the translation must always be idiomatic (Mounce, 311). Thus, third person imperatives are usually translated with the helping verb “let” (as in this verse: “*Let no man deceive you*”). Through no fault of English translators, this has a tendency to conceal the force of the imperative by suggesting a *permissive* nuance (Fantin, 82-83). But the imperative, even in the third person, is more akin to *he must* or periphrastically *I command him to*. Simply put, the Greek is much stronger than a permissive idea, engaging the volition as it does and placing a requirement on the individual (Wallace, 486). Compare Matthew 5:16 where Jesus says, “Even so *let your light shine* before men.” The construction is a third person singular imperative. But Jesus is not offering a polite suggestion here. He is not merely encouraging us to illuminate society with our positive influence. Far from it. The Master is issuing a command, a divinely given obligation just like when Paul issued the imperative, “I command you to walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). In order to be faithful to God, one *must* let their Christian light shine before others. No other option is available for those who wish to remain among the redeemed.

The point is that even though the third person imperative is usually translated with an English permissive structure, this sense is a phenomenon of English translation, not Greek. The strength of the command given in the Greek third person imperative is just as forceful as the second person imperative, despite a rendering that may, on the surface of a translation, seem weaker (Porter, 55). It is up to the exegete (interpreter, teacher) to make this known to his audience. While it is true there is a “permissive imperative” (sometimes called an “imperative of toleration”), this usage does not normally imply that some deed is approved by the speaker/writer. This permissive imperative is best treated as a statement of *allowance* or *toleration*. This is the case because the connotation of “permission” is usually too positive to convey adequately the nuance involved in this type of imperative. It more probably reflects that the

speaker/writer resigns himself to the possibility that an action may occur, but he does so without offering approval of the action (Fantin, 76). For example, Paul uses a third person singular imperative when he says, concerning the unbelieving spouse who chooses to leave their Christian mate, “But if the unbelieving depart, *let him depart*” (1 Cor. 7:15). The apostle is hardly giving approval to dissolve a marriage. It is just that the permissive imperative more strongly addresses the heart of the rebellious than if the apostle had said, “If the unbeliever departs, that is OK!” (Wallace, 485; 488-489; Brooks/Winbery, 129).

LESSON LEARNED

What should be appreciated is that God absolutely forbids Christians to allow themselves to be deceived by “vain or empty words.” It

may initially seem strange that God would *command* his children not to allow themselves to be deceived by false teachers or to be led astray by their error. But this is exactly what is involved in the prohibition articulated in Ephesians 5:6. God *demand*s that members of his church exercise their human responsibility in examining all doctrines and to accept only that which is in harmony with His revealed will. A failure to do so often results in one being deceived in the spiritual realm. If so, this equals disobedience to a God-given responsibility. God commands — *Don't allow anyone to deceive you with empty words!* May God help us to be obedient in this regard.

For a list of Sources in writing this article, see: seektheoldpaths.com/stopn11.htm#SOUR

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A Church That Flies...

(Continued from page 81)

tells us in His holy word that if we will trust in Him and build the church as He has instructed, it will function properly. The error among those who seek to change the church is that they do not trust in God's design. Some would have you believe that if you build it according to God's pattern, it will not fly! Two thousand years have proven otherwise. If it worked in the first century [and it did], what makes us think we can improve upon God's design in this century?

Third, *any problem or failure that might happen to arise, lies not in the design of the craft that God has built, but the ones who might happen to be at the helm*. Placed in capable hands, an airplane can and will operate properly. Pilot error is the cause of much of aviation's mishaps. Likewise, when God's church is placed in capable hands, it will meet all of the divine specifications and it will operate properly and function at peak performance. This is precisely why God set forth the qualifications and duties of elders and deacons in His holy Word. If the church is not functioning as it should, blame is to be laid at the feet

of elders who will not shepherd the flock as they should, preachers who will not preach the truth without fear and favor of men, and members whose lives are not in harmony with God's will.

One closing thought. The article to which I refer is a clear call to abandon that pattern set forth in God's word in exchange for something that is “functional.” It is the age-old argument that “the end justifies the means.” And so this misguided author concludes: “Central to this endeavor is a willingness to disconnect form from function, to assert that function is primary, and to suggest that it is possible to build a contemporary church that pleases God even if it does not look exactly like the church of the first or the nineteenth century.”

In the final analysis, I prefer a church whose feet are on the ground, standing on the Rock of Ages, as opposed to one that would soar through the skies with no direction, no compass, and no certain destination.

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[NOTE: The writer of the article under examination is Tim Woodruff. The article appeared in *Wineskins* and other publications.]



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herd, I shall want always. He makes me to lie down in the barren desert. He leadeth me by the turbulent waters. He abuses my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for his name's sake. Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I greatly fear evil: for he is with me; his rod and staff punish me. He prepares a table of corruption before me in the presence of my friends. He anointest my head with used motor oil; my cup is full of evil. Surely evil and punishment shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in Hell with the devil forever" ...**Joe McPeak, Rock Island, TN.**

herd, I shall want always. He makes me to lie down in the barren desert. He leadeth me by the turbulent waters. He abuses my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for his name's sake. Yeah though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I greatly fear evil: for he is with me; his rod and staff punish me. He prepares a table of corruption before me in the presence of my friends. He anointest my head with used motor oil; my cup is full of evil. Surely evil and punishment shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in Hell with the devil forever" ...**Joe McPeak, Rock Island, TN.**

"A family of fish that live in the depths of the sea actually go fishing; pole, dangling bait and all. This is only natural, since they, like people who go fishing, like to eat fish. This group of fish is collectively called the angler fish. The front dorsal spine in the female angler is located on her head. It is much longer than any of the other dorsal fins and has a fleshy bait on the end. When hungry, she sits very still and dangles the bait in front of her mouth. It doesn't take long before something swims up to investigate this bait as its possible lunch. But before it can think about taking a sample, the angler has turned the tables and eaten her own lunch. Of course, this system wouldn't work very well in the pitch darkness one mile below the surface of the ocean without one other special provision. Like many other fish at such depths, the angler is able to generate her own light. In her case, only the bait lights up, so she stays invisible to her victims. The chemical method she uses to create the light is nearly 100 percent efficient! In His imaginative creativity, God was pleased to place creatures a mile below the surface of the sea. Yet, in His mercy He has provided them with everything they need to make their living there. — *From Creation Moments*

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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