

The Old Paths

June 24, 2007

Your attention is respectfully directed to the sixth chapter of Jeremiah, where we find the prophet speaking of the impending doom of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. He tells them of the hostile army approaching from the north, which would lay siege to Jerusalem, so that they could storm the city (verses 1-8). This is the breaking of judgment over them from the Lord. Because they will listen to no warning, the judgment will be unsparingly rendered. They had allowed themselves to be confirmed in their shameless conduct by false prophets and wicked priests, and since they had rejected all council to reform, none was to be spared (verses 9-15). This doom was theirs in spite of their outward sacrificial service. What could be done to avoid it? Was there any way of escape for them? Yes! Jeremiah thunders it in the ears of all, and it seems they should have determined this before, as it is obvious. Listen to him: "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." (Jeremiah 6:16).

Sadly, these people said, "We will not walk therein." They turned away from the salvation the Lord offered to them. Thus, God revealed in the remainder of the chapter that He would execute judgment upon them by means of a wicked nation, as they were useless metal to Him.

Beloved, this has been introduced today because we are in so many ways like Israel and Judah of old; thus, the inspired Paul writes: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope," (Romans 15:4). Like those of ancient times, we too are called upon to stand and view the paths before us and the end to which they lead (Matthew 7:13-14). When Jesus says, "Enter in at the strait gate," He takes the choice from us. Let us now name some of the old paths of the Lord in which we must walk.

The Old Paths of Biblical Morality

The world is preaching the doctrine of Humanism, a philosophy which conceives of humanity as the supreme factor - the only thing that is real. Therefore, man's welfare, happiness, and pleasure are of the highest importance. Man is good and there is nothing that brings him pleasure that can be declared to be wrong or sinful. Work and responsibility bring hardship and worry, and are therefore, a burden to his best interest. Pleasure alone is good.

In the quest for pleasure many of the world are bowing before the altar of sex, an altar which we admit has been served by many in bygone ages. But never before has it been set before young and old as “the way to go”! Nothing is forbidden! Nothing shocks us anymore! Anything goes! As false teachers not only condone immorality, but many times practice it themselves, is it not time that we who stand at the threshold ask for the old paths that we and others might walk therein and have rest for our souls? What are the old paths of the Lord in this respect?

We are taught that God is to be first in our affections and that we are to strive to please Him rather than ourselves (Matthew 6:33; 22:37). They who follow humanism will be lost, while those serving the Lord will be free from eternal death (Romans 8:1-2).

Along the same line, when it comes to our fellow man, it is his welfare rather than our own that concerns those who walk in the old paths (Matthew 22:39). Like the Samaritan in Luke 10, whom we call good, our duty is to help our fellow man in distress (Romans 15:1-3). There is no greater distress than that of the man who is in sin.

When it comes to the sexual revolution, as some are desirous to call it, our course is clearly revealed by the Lord. The acts of adultery and fornication are not only within themselves forbidden, but loving our fellow man, we are not even to covet his wife or daughter (Matthew 5:27-32). As for homosexuality and other unnatural acts, the Lord’s will cannot be perverted (Romans 1:26-27). These things and others that could be brought out strike firmly against the modern idea of men who say, “Love for self and gratifying self are of supreme importance in life.” God says it will damn the soul in hell (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Shall we stand, see, and ask for the old paths, and walk therein, or shall we turn our hearts toward destruction as the people in Jeremiah’s day, saying, “We will not walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16)?

The Old Paths of Sound Bible Doctrine

One of the chief reasons for the downfall of the Hebrews in the days of Jeremiah was the false prophets and wicked teachers and cruel priests. Instead of following the system outlined by the Lord for men to worship Him, they had sought the way of idols, seeking the blessings that flowed, supposedly, from them. Rather than conducting themselves according to the divine standards, they wanted to be as the heathen around them. Thus, divine standards were lowered while falsehood was exalted in the eyes of the people. False teachers will nearly always precede false practice. Or in other terms, “false teaching will always lead to false

conduct!" Speaking for God, Jeremiah said, "They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," (Jeremiah 2:13). It was the height of folly for them to think God changeable, or that by simply changing His Word as they proclaimed it to others, these priests had changed God and would be unaccountable to Him. So writes the prophet: "Hath a nation changed...their glory for that which doth not profit," (Jeremiah 2:11). The glory they could have while serving God was the only thing changed or now different, being unprofitable. Again, now they must stand in the way, and see and ask for the old paths and walk therein, if they were to have rest, or receive the glory they were promised.

Today almost any doctrine the mind of man can devise or invent is being preached and practiced under the guise of religion. And much of this is in "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Really this is not something that started with our day, but the Apostles of the Lord experienced the same thing (1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:16-19).

However, these inspired men warned that such would continue, therefore enabling us to know what to do when it is proclaimed by others (Romans 16:17-18). We as followers of the Master of men must exercise care and concern as we believe, accept, and faithfully teach others to maintain sound or wholesome doctrine (1 Timothy 3:13).

We are hearing from some quarters an old deceitful cry: "We need more love and less fighting. We should emphasize the areas of agreement and play down the circles of differences." To many, such statements are quite appealing. However, if that means it no longer matters what we believe, what is taught, or how we live, or fail to live, the Christian life, then I must reciprocate: The voices of men have not and cannot drown out the voice of the Bible (Titus 2:1).

You see, friends, God and not man is the author of the Bible (Galatians 1:11-12), and it is His doctrine or teaching that is profitable to us (2 Timothy 3:16). Those who preach it are to find their direction in the Bible. These are my directions; therefore, I believe in sound indoctrination. It does matter how you worship. The church is identified and known by God and others by the way it teaches His Word. What seems right may not be right (Proverbs 14:12). We walk by the revelation of God's Word, not by the approval of human understanding or customs; "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17). The doctrine that has been planted by men will be uprooted (Matthew 15:13). Those who promote these doctrines obviously have not remained in the bounds of God's Word, and are thus void of the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

May God help us all to avoid the pitfalls of the Hebrew nation. We can, if we will but profit from their mistakes. "Thus saith the Lord, 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' But they said, 'We will not walk therein.'" - Barney Owens (From The Old Paths Pulpit No. 2, M. Lynwood Smith Publications 1978).

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