

Our purpose is to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

OLD PATHS ADVOCATE

“To continue speaking the truth in love,” “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” “keeping the ordinance as delivered.”

“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 of your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16) “And they that be of Thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in.” (Isa. 58:12).

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NO. 2

THE AUTUMN OF LIFE

By *BILLY D. DICKINSON*

There is something about autumn that resonates deep within us, bringing a sort of “cooling off” season, and it is sandwiched between summer and chilly winter. The days get shorter and nights are longer; temperatures drop and most vegetation decreases; some trees go through various stages of color and eventually become gray skeletons (as they shed all their leaves). Fall is inevitably a time of change! While some of those changes are beautiful and vibrant, there is also death and decay right in the midst of it all.

Indeed, the season of autumn serves as a metaphor for many important lessons and truths that we need to take to heart in our lives. This is seen in the short epistle of Jude where false teachers are pictured as “autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (verse 12/ ASV). W. E. Vine says that these “unfruitful and worthless men are figuratively described as trees such as they are at the close of autumn, fruitless and leafless” (P. 92). Since Jude used this season in a metaphorical way, it is easily seen how autumn can be emblematic of life itself. Yes, there comes a time when we find ourselves in the autumn of life! What do I mean by that? I mean that the golden days of summer have come and gone and we can see that wintertime is approaching.

As William Cullen Bryant once put it, “Autumn is the year’s last, loveliest smile.” It’s a period of time where we are not as youthful and vibrant as we used to be, but it can also be a wonderful time of beauty, reflection, and observation. Most importantly, it is our last opportunity to make sure that we are prepared for what is coming--- WINTER (the season that is characterized by coldness, misery, bitterness and death)! Remember, too, that the kind of autumn you must face will be the result,

at least in large measure, by how you lived out those earlier years. Let’s notice some of the factors that will determine if autumn for us is a profitable time or simply a season of regret.

THE BREVITY OF LIFE

As we watch the leaves fall one by one and flutter to the ground, we are reminded that earthly life soon comes to an end, serving as a vivid reminder of our own mortality. Remember that nature is simply God at work in His creation, so as each year quickly passes through the four seasons, we should be just that certain that the final season of life is coming for all of us. As Joshua declared in the long ago, death is “the way of all the earth” (Josh. 23:14). In fact, when we get to autumn, not only should we be reminded that “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9:27), but we should be impressed with how brief life really is. After all, doesn’t each year pass by so quickly? That has certainly been true of 2017!

“Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth,” David affirmed in Psalm 39:5, “and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” The handbreadth is one of the smallest natural measures, basically involving the palm with the four fingers expanded. How much grain or flour can you hold in one hand? The answer to that question illustrates how short our time upon this earth is, especially when compared to eternity. When David said to God, “Mine age is as nothing before thee,” he was acknowledging that God is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2), while “man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Beloved, we need to be living in view of the vast eternity that awaits each of us! That leads to the next point . . .

THE NEED FOR PREPARATION

Whatever needs to be done before the deadness of

continued on page 9

CONTENTS

Vol. XC No. 2



ADVOCATE

The Autumn of Life 1
 Editorial 2
 Querist Column 3
 The Christian Family - Divorce Consequences ... 4
 The Traditional Midnight Singing 6
 Repenting or Reporting? 7
 Taking a Stand..... 9

Announcement 11
 Our Departed..... 11
 THE BACK PAGE..... 12

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Editorial

MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO

By RICK MARTIN

The prophet Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet” because he lamented over the departure of the people of God and pleaded for them to return. In his pleadings he shows that Israel had forgotten God, they had forsaken Him, and they had also corrupted His teachings and worship. In verse 31 of chapter 5 he says, “the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means”; and then he adds some very interesting words, “and my people love to have it so.” With no adequate guidance, they quickly degenerated into a nation of idolaters and oppressors, and “the people just loved it!”

The pattern of Israel’s departure, and their continued rebellion, is found in Jer. 6:10-16. In these verses the prophet describes the departure and he could very well be describing the society we live in today.

First of all we see that they refused to listen to the Word of God. God spoke, but they would not hear! Jesus said of a later generation; Matt. 13:15 “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” When people refuse to listen to the Word of God, He cannot guide their lives, because God guides us through His Word. Throughout history man has refused to heed God’s message. Too many people think they can determine the purpose of man, the goal of man, and the destiny of man, but God knows best. In fact, God knows the only way! Some still refuse to heed the message.

Second we see these people were obsessed with material things. Intense desire for material things often leads to immoral means of obtaining them. When people develop a lust for things they will develop their own justification for whatever means they use to fulfill their desires. Man has had a hard time learning this lesson because man often measure success by dollar signs.

continued on page 10

QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DE FRANCE

Question: Is it wrong to include oil in the loaf in the Lord's Supper?

Answer: Thayer's *Lexicon* defines *artos* (the Greek word translated bread or loaf in the Lord's Supper passages) as: "food composed of flour mixed with water and baked; the Israelites made it in the form of an oblong or round cake, as thick as one's thumb, and as large as a plate or platter..." (p. 75). This description has led some to conclude that flour and water are the only ingredients permitted in unleavened bread, such as should be used in the Lord's Supper – no oil, no salt, etc. Thayer's comments receive strong support from Jewish tradition. In the JPS Torah Commentary on Exodus, Rabbi Dr. Nahum Sarna says this about the preparation of *matsot* (the unleavened bread used in the Passover): "Extraordinarily stringent regulations govern the manufacture of *matsot*. Their sole ingredients are flour and water. The flour may be made only from grains that are susceptible to fermentation. These are listed in Mishnah Pesahim 2:5 as wheat, barley, emmer, rye, and oats, although in practice only wheat is used. The water to be mixed with the flour is first left standing overnight. *Matsah shemurah*, "carefully guarded *matsah*" which many Jews use to fulfill the obligation to eat *matsah* on the first night of Passover, is made from flour milled from wheat that has been scrupulously supervised from the time of the harvesting on. Regular *matsah* is baked from wheat flour that has been specially milled for the purpose and has been carefully supervised from the time of milling through the baking. The entire manufacturing process from the kneading to completion must take no more than eighteen minutes, during which period the dough is continuously manipulated in order to retard fermentation. As a further precaution, perforation is applied to allow any bubbles of air to escape" (p. 57-58). One may notice an absence of scripture in the explanation of these rules. The aforementioned recipe and preparation process is based solely on Jewish tradition and is not found in the Law of Moses. In fact, the idea that *matsot* or *artos* must consist of only flour and water is not supported by the scripture. In Exodus 29.2, God instructs how Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated as priests. The common English version says: "And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young

bull and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour)." This punctuation indicates that there are three kinds of bread: unleavened bread (*matsot*), unleavened cakes with oil mixed into the dough, and unleavened wafers with oil poured on them after being baked. Many commentators follow this reading. However, the Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek) lists only two varieties of unleavened bread – *matsot* and wafers – and clearly shows that oil was mixed into the *matsot* (at least on this occasion). "And unleavened bread, kneaded with olive oil, and unleavened cakes, basted with olive oil, you will prepare them from pure wheat made of fine wheat flour" (Exodus 29.2, Lexham English Septuagint). Furthermore, the Greek word used by the Alexandrian scholars to describe this unleavened bread made with oil was *artos*, the same word used in the New Testament to identify the loaf used by Christ in the institution of the Lord's Supper. Based on this evidence, it is impossible to sustain that oil is scripturally forbidden as an ingredient of unleavened bread. From the perspective of this writer, the scripture does not give an absolute recipe for the loaf (other than the prohibition against leaven). It is likely that salt was usually included in loaves baked for religious purposes (Leviticus 2.13). Oil may or may not have been used. Therefore, the inclusion or exclusion of oil is a matter of liberty, left up to the preference of the individual preparing the loaf.

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**THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY - DIVORCE
CONSEQUENCES FOR THE GUILTY PARTY**

By GREG GAY

“Once upon a time,” as ancient stories begin, divorce was rare in our culture and even rarer among us. The frequency of divorce in United States really expanded in the 1970’s with the advent of state’s “no fault” divorce laws. According to Audrey Jones, “It was the first time a spouse could also cite irreconcilable differences as a reason for divorce, making a divorce much easier to obtain. Prior to this point, anyone wanting to end their marriage had to prove the presence of adultery or cruelty in the marriage” (http://divorce.lovetoknow.com/Historical_Divorce_Rate_Statistics).

The CDC reports over 800,000 divorces annually in 2016, but that does not count the states of California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, and New Mexico, which would likely push the total number near a million. (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>).

The subject of divorce and remarriage remains one of our greatest dividers and is fraught with much difficulty and controversy. It is also a subject we may avoid studying and discussing, likely because it is such an emotionally charged subject and is a real and present source of heartbreak in so many families.

Since divorce is quite common, at least in our culture, and since God addresses this subject, we need to know what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage and how to deal with issues scripturally as individuals, in our families, and as leaders in our congregations.

In a recent article in this series on The Gift of Desire (Old Paths Advocate, December 2017), I used 1 Corinthians 7 as an example to explain there are relationship messes we can get ourselves into where we no longer have a right to marry. While that is certainly true, in that article I referred to the guilty party in a divorce being able to remarry their former spouse without sin. Unfortunately, I outran my headlights with that example and took it further than the scriptures allow. My thanks to those who pointed this out to me.

This article takes a closer look at the consequences for the guilty party in a Christian’s divorce. Other articles

are planned for later in the series to address other aspects of divorce.

In short, nothing in the scriptures commands a couple to divorce if sexual immorality occurs. They may decide to continue in the marriage and work to rebuild their relationship. But, if the innocent party’s response to unfaithfulness is divorce for that reason, one of the consequences is that the guilty party loses the right to remarry without sin. If they do remarry, even to their former spouse, both parties in the new marriage commit the sin of adultery, not as a onetime act, but as a continuous sin.

The phrases “guilty party” and “innocent party” are not Biblical quotes, but are for our convenience in discussing issues of divorce and remarriage. The one who is “guilty” refers to the spouse in a marriage who commits the sin of sexual immorality (fornication). The spouse who is “innocent” is the one in the marriage who did not commit the sin of sexual immorality.

For further clarification, we have brethren who are “no exception,” with views that include they do not believe the exception of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 applies today, therefore the New Testament does not allow divorce or remarriage for any reason.

We also have “exception” brethren, which means they do believe divorce is allowed by the New Testament scriptures in certain circumstances and that remarriage after divorce is permissible in certain circumstances. For full disclosure, I am writing from the perspective of one who believes the exception verses of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 do apply today.

Those verses give Jesus’ words: “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 5:31-32 NKJV).

“He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:8-9 NKJV).

Jesus is addressing future kingdom citizens, as proven by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul, writing by inspired Apostolic authority, tells all, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:10). That verse refers to what Jesus legislated in person while here on earth. Paul also writes, “But to the rest I, not the Lord, say” (1 Corinthians 7:10, 12 NKJV), referring to additional revelation on this subject. A review of who Paul addresses necessarily infers Jesus was regulating marriages of members of the church with what he said in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

Notice from the two passages in Matthew:

Marriage is intended to be for life. That was true in the Garden of Eden, throughout Old Testament times, and is still true today. “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6 NKJV).

Divorce for any reason always ends a marriage, regardless of the reason for the divorce. The divorce in 1 Corinthians 7: 10-11 is not for sexual immorality, yet changes the parties from being married to unmarried. “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11 NKJV).

A divorced person is not commanded to marry again. There is no sin in choosing to remain single, even if one has a scriptural right to remarry. In fact, Paul commends the attention a single person can give to serving God compared to someone who is married. (1 Corinthians 7:32-34).

A formerly married person may or may not be eligible to marry again because of the restrictions that God assigns. Those who were once married but are now unmarried in the verses cited above (1 Corinthians 7:10-11) are clearly restricted in who they can marry without sin. A “bond” can remain, even though the marriage does not exist.

This bond is also in keeping with what Paul writes, “So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man” (Romans 7:3 NKJV). Contextually this is about the

law, but the example given is of a marriage where the former marriage ends, and a new marriage contracted, yet there is no release from the original binding of the relationship. This does not mean they are still “married in God’s eyes.” The lack of release from the original bond adulterated the new marital relationship.

Similarly, there are restrictions put on the Christian who is the guilty party in a divorce and chooses to remarry. His or her immorality is the cause for the marriage ending. However, because of their unfaithfulness, even though they are no longer married, the bond from the marriage is not gone. Therefore, for them to marry again causes them and the new person they marry to enter a continuing state of adultery. “...whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9 NKJV).

The adultery is continuous because the word “commits” is in the present tense, meaning it is always present in the relationship described. It is not correct for the guilty party and a new spouse to make a confession of fault, continue in their new marriage, and everything is supposedly fine. Their marriage continues to be adultery and does not cease to be adultery so long as it exists.

Sexual immorality (fornication) is the only reason Jesus gives for breaking the lifelong commitment for two Christians. Some want to limit fornication only to immorality prior to marriage. It is also common these days to attempt to twist any non-sexual marital difficulty into some strained meaning of fornication, but neither are appropriate. Forbidden relationships, which include marital unfaithfulness, are named in Leviticus 18 and are all referred to as fornication in Acts 15:29 as an umbrella-type term describing all sexual immorality, whether before, during, or after marriage.

Remarriage is only blessed for the innocent party who divorced because of sexual immorality. Remarriage for the guilty is not allowed because they divorced without the exception allowed the innocent. The guilty party’s guilt is the only reason the innocent party spouse is innocent, thus enabling the exception clause, which allows them, the innocent party, to remarry if they choose to do so.

Logically, one cannot be both the guilty party and the innocent party at the same time. And just as obviously,

both cannot have the same restrictions and the same freedoms, or else the verses cited mean nothing

Even though difficult, I would that all the situations we encounter would be as simple as those described above. There are a million “what ifs?” and enough twists and turns in these areas to make a cat-tangled ball of yarn look orderly. Where preachers usually get involved is not helping couples work out problems along the way, but rather being asked to help justify a decision that has been made where all want biblical legitimacy for decisions hastily and poorly made.

Years ago, I studied several times with an out-of-duty brother who was the guilty party in two marriages and had married again. He requested the study to find out what he would need to do to be accepted. He and his new wife were present when I advised he should end the third marriage and live apart for the rest of his life for his best hope of heaven. His response was sad but honest, “Oh, I don’t have enough faith for that.” He is correct, many do not have enough faith to do what God teaches on this subject.

Some, this very day, are in relationships that are not lawful, and they know it. Yet, because they are accepted in their family and in the congregation where they worship, everyone pretends it does not matter. Some congregations tolerate such wrong situations without discussion, hoping the passing of time will somehow make the situation correct. How that usually works out is not to solve the problem, only to set the example that anything goes at this congregation on that subject, which only adds more and more complexity to ever fixing the mess that now exists.

I know of other dear brothers and sisters who were the guilty party in their divorce, have publicly repented of their wrong, and are doing their best to make heaven their eternal abode. They are living their life in an unmarried state, in keeping with God’s word. I regard them highly, not for the sin they committed, but for their willingness to humble themselves for life proving their repentance for their sin. 5109 Chicago Ave., Fair Oaks, CA, 95628, 916-804-3787, gregorypgay@gmail.com



THE TRADITIONAL MIDNIGHT SINGING A TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY ELMORE

By JIMMIE C. SMITH

We just concluded the 70th consecutive Oklahoma New Year Meeting by singing the old year out '17 and the new year '18 in at the Christian Heritage Academy in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The crowd numbered 942 people.

The meeting began in 1947 at Sulphur, Oklahoma, the brain child of brethren Tom. E. Smith and M. Lynwood Smith and did not at that time always encompass or conclude on December 31st. The second year it was held at Ada and the third at Healdton, OK. Each year thereafter it moved about Oklahoma at the request of congregations (there was no governing body). At some early point it took on the name, The Oklahoma New Year Meeting.

According to Johnny Elmore, it was in 1953 that it was again held at Healdton and didn't conclude on December 31st because it was noised about that a Pentecostal group north of Healdton planned to sing the old year out and the new year in. That year a large number of young people attended the meeting, many of whom had attended the Stamps Singing Schools in Dallas. He said there must have been thirty of them who went out to the singing that night and were asked to sing. So they sang “Praise Ye Jehovah” of course, acapella. This was a song unknown to the Pentecostal people and they went wild.

Lynwood suggested that “we begin our own tradition of singing the old year out and the new year in” and as the saying goes, “the rest is history.” We don't have a record of where the meeting was held the next year; but Billy Jack Ivey reported in the OPA that in 1955/56 it was held at Washington, OK and they sang the old year out with old songs from memory concluding with ‘Rock of Ages’. Lynwood led a rousing prayer at the end. That was the only meeting that Johnny missed for nearly sixty years and retained the song leading duties of that last final service.

My first meeting to attend was in '66/67 at Norman, and Johnny conducted the singing and every year thereafter concluding with ‘Rock of Ages’ as the old years expired (except in 1978 when he went home to Ardmore and

was stranded and his now deceased son, Stan Elmore led the last song) He doesn't know when that tradition started and thinks he may have led the singing in that service from the first, he and Lynwood were a team until Lynwood in his old age was replaced as the conductor of the meeting.

We have a lot of exceptional song leaders, many with better voices than Johnny, but in my estimation; "he has no peer in being able to 'get it out of an audience'". I have not seen such in my generation and this opinion is shared by many. In '98/99 the meeting was in Ok. City and the crowd was estimated to be 1500 and believed to be the largest gathering in the history of our brotherhood. When a thousand to fifteen hundred people congregate from all over the U.S. and beyond, under Johnny's direction and unrehearsed, swell their voices to rapturous heights with the precision of an orchestra it is an experience to behold.

Four years ago after Johnny had experienced almost unbearable grief in the loss of his only son from cancer followed by the loss of his lifelong companion Sally. He was a 'broken man.' Nearly every year, if not every year, Johnny was asked to come back and lead the midnight singing. Larry Combs and John Strain, of the Moore congregation, prevailed on him to come and conduct the singing the last night again and he agreed.

I was at the back of the Heritage Auditorium when Johnny ascended the steps and entered. He is an Oklahoma native and so loved by everyone, and of course people who had not expressed their condolences all swarmed him and wept with him.

When he ascended the stage for the midnight hour at the age of eighty two, with a defeated countenance he owned the heart of every person there. When the singing began it was indeed as he told me a "magical moment." As we sang the songs of the redeemed; his countenance changed before our eyes and he straightened up and was nearly on his tiptoes, caught up in the moment and did he ever conduct a singing. He told me he felt the singing that night was the "apex" of all the midnight hour singings.

This year his oldest grandchild was on his deathbed with cancer in Oklahoma City. Johnny visited him that day, then shared the stage with Daniel Smith as he has the past three years for the midnight service. He

was offered the entire hour, but asked for only twenty minutes. All songs in that service are sung by memory. Johnny led the traditional song that spanned the old and the new.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood,
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.
While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
And behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

It is enough just to say, "I Was There!"
—Jimmie C. Smith

OKLAHOMA NEW YEAR'S MEETING

The Oklahoma New Year's Meeting was under the authority of the congregation at Moore. They are to be commended for planning and execution. Every detail was thought of and the highest level of love and hospitality was shown by the entire congregation. I personally want to thank the preachers who excelled in edifying the assembly of God's people and the song leaders for helping us learn new songs. Brother Daniel Smith is an expert and I'm thankful his talents were utilized by the congregation in putting together the song book and selecting the song leaders each service. Brother Robert Hullett did an outstanding job vetting the young men and sermons delivered by the young men the last service. I want to thank Brother Johnny Elmore for leading the midnight singing and brother Don Pruitt for assisting in prayer for that service. It was my great honor and blessing to assist the congregation at Moore. May God bless all His children with a wonderful 2018!
—Cullen Smith

REPENTING OR REPORTING?

By DARRELL CRAWFORD

In Luke 13:3,5 Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." In Acts 2:38 Peter told those people on the birthday of the church to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins;

and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts chapter 8:2 Peter told Simon ““Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” This theme of repentance runs throughout the bible. According to The American tract society dictionary, “Repentance is A change of mind, accompanied with regret and sorrow for something done, and an earnest wish that it was undone.

It seems that many members of the Lords church today, are not necessarily interested in repenting of sins, but, they only want to report them. This seems to be happening when people repeat the same sins repeatedly. Just confess (report) them and you’re ok.

In Acts chapter 8, Simon the sorcerer was converted to Christianity. When he saw the miracles, the Apostles were doing and that they were conferring these powers on people by the laying on of their hands, Simon offered them money. His desire was to obtain these powers and the ability to pass on these gifts to others as well. Peter told him he was wrong and needed to repent of these sins, that is, he had to be sorry for what he had done.

Too many people, it seems are not sorry for what they have done, just sorry they were caught. That kind of sorrow does not work repentance. “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” II Cor.7:10. Notice, “Godly sorrow produces repentance”. Repentance is also a change of mind which leads to a change of attitude and ultimately leads to a change of life. Too many people would rather ‘report’ that they have sinned rather than repent, and change their life! This kind of attitude will not do any good at all. Some of our friends in the religious world will simply say, “forgive me for I have sinned”.

In Acts Chapter 8:22, when Simon tried to purchase the ability to pass on the power of God, he was told by the Apostle Peter to “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” He knew that he had done wrong, and he asked Peter to pray for him, verse 24.

This helps us to better understand the “second law of pardon”. The General epistles, James, I and II Peter, I, II and III John, and Jude, were written to the church;

they were not written to the “unsaved “of the world. A Christian CAN pray to the Father through Jesus Christ and ask for forgiveness of their sins. People of the world, sinners, cannot.

John 9:31 tells us “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” Not that God literally does not hear the prayers of a sinner, but that He does not act directly on the prayers of a sinner. We can see this in Acts chapter 9, Saul had met Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he asked what he should do, he was told to “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (Acts 9:6). He went to the city and spent three days fasting and praying. After that, a man named Ananias was dispatched to him by the Lord. Ananias “told him what he must do! Acts 22:16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Again, in Acts chapter 10, a man named Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who was a righteous man had been praying to God. God heard his prayers and acted indirectly as He did with Saul. “Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter “He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do. Acts 10:5-6. Cornelius and Saul were looking for the truth and God made a way possible for them to hear it and become Christians. If a person is really seeking the truth of God’s word, He will make it possible for them to hear the truth.

When some Christians get into trouble the first thing they want to do is “make a confession”. The first thing to do is repent, without repentance, our sins cannot be forgiven. Confession is of no value without repentance. Any sin left unforgiven will keep us out of heaven on the day of Judgment. Reporting without repenting is an empty gesture on our part. It will do us no good at all!

When many “confess “their sins, are they truly sorry for their sin, or just sorry they were caught? There is a very significant difference. Simon in Acts 8, was told to “repent and to pray” James in James 5:16 told us to “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” I John 1:9 tells us that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I John 2:1 “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And

if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. "Again, these are General epistles, written to Christians, those in the Church and not to those of the world. As Christians, Jesus is our "advocate" with the Father; I John 2:1. Christians can go to God in prayer and expect Him to hear our prayers and to act directly on them, if they are prayed according to His will. So, we need to decide before we act, are we repenting or reporting?"

TAKING A STAND

Years of calling the lost to salvation are often resolved by a single hearse ride to church. Don't be afraid to take a stand for what it is right.

In John chapter nine, Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. When the Jewish leaders, who were the enemies of Christ, questioned the parents of the healed man about the miracle, they refused to commit themselves. The Bible says this was because they feared the Jews (John 9:22).

Certainly the right way does not always mean the easy way. Being faithful Christians calls for courage. The apostle Paul says, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

In our time, when we stand for what is right, we must not be afraid to go against the crowd. Those who stand for the truth and on the side of righteousness will always be outnumbered, the right way is not the way of least resistance. Jesus taught that the majority would follow the road to destruction (Matt. 7:13, 14). Christians are not to be conformed to the things of this world (Rom. 12:2).

Standing for the right will often cause the loss of companies; it might bring ridicule; it might cause us to be openly persecuted. Paul, after naming some of the things he had suffered for the Cause of Christ went on to say, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution: (2 Tim. 3:12).

No, it is not always easy to do right, especially when it means going against what others are doing. But Christ says, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). When our faith in God is as it should be, worldly opposition loses its significance.

By James Cating

AUTUMN OF LIFE continued from page one

winter, autumn provides us with that last opportunity. Generally speaking, this season is regarded as the end of the growing season. It is harvest time-- Pumpkins are ready to be picked in the fall and apples are a delicious fall fruit. In preparation for the days of winter soon to come, autumn beckons for the produce of the field to be gathered in and stored up. Also, the animals begin to prepare for the dearth of food that generally comes in winter. You can see squirrels, for example, hard at work gathering acorns and storing them up. By natural instinct, all the animals know that winter is coming and they are getting ready for it in their own way.

Although man is the most intelligent creature in this material world, he often doesn't have the same kind of foresight in preparing himself for eternity. Here is one of the saddest statements found in the Bible: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). One time a United States Army officer told of the contrast he saw in his pupils during two different eras of teaching at the Artillery School in Fort Sills, OK. From 1958 to 1960, the attitude was so lax that the instructor had a problem of getting the students to stay awake for the lectures. However, during the 1965 to 1967 classes, the men were alert and took plenty of notes. Bearing in mind that they listened to the same lectures, what made the difference in their attitudes? Well, the 1965 class knew that in less than six weeks they would be going to Vietnam and they understood the need to be prepared for that challenge. In other words, it was a matter of life and death for them!

Indeed, autumn-time cries out for us to make sure, in view of a vast eternity, that we have made the right kind of adequate preparation. Providing us with the final opportunity to get ready, the time for procrastination and neglect must be put behind us.

TIME FOR REST AND OBSERVATION

There is a sense in which the earth progresses into a period of rest. After all, in autumn the fields lie fallow and some forms of wildlife go into hibernation. It is a good time to take a drive in the country and look at the beautiful landscape and simply think about the beauty of God's creation (declaring how great the Creator must be/ Psalm 19:1). The truth is that each of the four

seasons are beautiful in their own way and should be appreciated for what they are. Certainly, when it comes to the “autumn of life,” it is a good time to stop and reflect upon time and eternity, and how we stand in our relationship with the Lord. Paul wrote: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Cor. 13:5).

The point is that we need to make a careful analysis of our lives to determine where we need to seek God’s forgiveness and make corrections where we can. Autumn-time provides us with the opportunity for rest and careful observation, and that’s something we need to make the most of.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

While there is something melancholy about this season of the year (where certain things leave you feeling that way), there is another side to the story. Do you realize that autumn-time is rich with different festivals that people celebrate, probably as much so as any time of the year. This is especially true for many farming cultures when they gather in their crops. Yes, autumn is also about the future-- It’s when trees start to spread their seeds (like the oak tree dropping its acorns to the ground); those acorns guarantee that there will be new life in the glorious springtime that will follow winter!

As we find ourselves in the “autumn of life,” facing the deadness of winter, let’s remember that we have a hope of eternal life. “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25) It is this hope that sustains us as we look forward to eternal springtime in the presence of God in heaven!

MY PEOPLE LOVE continued from page two

Many churches determine success in the same way. Instead of using the Gospel to draw men to Christ they use material things. People have become so obsessed with things in their personal lives that they think this is the way to draw men to Christ. They preached what is referred to as a social gospel. The question is, is God a god of bribery and entertainment? The answer is no. God wants people to come to Him because they love Him and appreciate the gift of His Son.

What method does God use to draw men and women to

Him? The answer is found in John 12:32, “And I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.” When we see the love that God has shown us through the crucifixion of His Son, we will be drawn to Him.

The early church offered the world nothing but the Gospel. It was not a message filled with material things. It was a message that called for a life of sacrifice and obedience. They offered nothing physical. There were no games, no retreats, and no amusements.

The obsession with material things is a great danger to the personal lives of men and to the church. Unfortunately, it is the same today, as God said long ago through the prophet Jeremiah, “My people love to have it so.”

Third, we see a group of people who deluded themselves with falsehoods. When people are walking the wrong path, Satan makes it easy for them to believe that, “everything is fine.” That was God’s message through Jeremiah and it is His message today. When people have no love for the truth; to know it, and to live by it, they will be lead to believe error.

The apostle Paul wrote that “some having itching ears, will heap unto themselves teachers after their own lust.” Today we have people who don’t want to hear the truth. You let some preacher come along and start telling them what they need to hear instead of what they want to hear; they get upset. They will find a preacher who will tell them what they want to hear and unfortunately we’ve got some of those today. Smooth preaching has resulted in many problems. Just like Israel of old, we now see the effects of poor leadership. But, like Israel, “my people love to have it so.”

Trusting and following false teaching will not save anyone. It never has and it never will. Like Israel of old we have people today who cry, “Peace, peace.” They say everything is ok, but like Israel they have deluded themselves with false teaching.

Last of all, we see they were not ashamed and could not blush. Israel of old rejected God, refused to listen to Him; they stole from the people, they cheated for personal gain, and they were not ashamed. The morality of a society can usually be measured by what causes people to blush and by what shames them.

We are living in a permissive society. Immorality is

widespread. We have become so accustomed to these things that we are hardly able to blush anymore. Television and movies and even commercials are filled with immoral acts and we sit there and let our minds be filled with such things. With vulgar speech, indecent dress, multiple divorces and social drinking that rule in world, some in the church are also affected. People pay no attention to these sins, because like Israel of old, “they love to have it so.”

Conclusion: The only possible cure for all of these attitudes is found in Jer. 6:16 “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” Israel of old had departed from God, and they hardly realized they had done so. They would not come back to the old paths.

Long ago God’s people failed to listen, they were obsessed with things, they deluded themselves with falsehoods, and they could not blush. They “just loved it that way.” Where are we today, brethren?

Rick Martin, mmartin@bellsouth.net

Announcement

SONG BOOKS - The Stony Point Church of Christ in Kansas City has a number of song books which we are willing to share with other congregations who can make use of them. There is no charge for the books. The churches which request the books must pay only for cost for shipping. There are a number of titles, so let us know the title requested, if we don’t have that one, we reserve the right to send a substitute title. The church ordering the books must pay for the shipping. There is no charge for the books. Paul O. Nichols, 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221

Our Departed

WISSINGER - George “Dan” Wissinger was born March 6, 1936 in Brixey, Mo. and departed this life December 28, 2017. It had been my privilege to know and work with Dan for over fifty years. You would be hard pressed to find a better man, husband or father. We first met in Lebanon, MO in the late fifties. Later

we both moved our families to Springfield where we worshipped together for over forty years. It was my privilege to ordain Dan and Virgil Hogland elders of the Fremont and Seminole congregation. He was a fine dedicated shepherd of the flock. After sometime, however, he couldn’t get the idea of preaching out of his mind. So he resigned and began carrying the gospel to foreign and well as nearby places. He continued in this work until his health would no longer permit it. At the time of his passing he was in Texas where he followed his wife who was undergoing treatment for liver cancer. During this time the family was carrying heavy burdens as they tried to deal with problems that were overwhelming. A large crowd gathered on January 3 at the Greenlawn East funeral home here in Springfield to show their love and respect for this man with whom so many of us had worked and worshipped. Dan had an infectious smile and a hearty laugh that one could never forget. I have lost a dear brother and one of my best friends. Dan leaves behind his wife Thelma, two daughters Janet and Julie and their families, one son Jeff and one brother and sister. —Ronny Wade

RICHARDSON - Lowell R. Richardson was born November 17, 1923 Near Long Lane, MO and departed this life January 5, 2018 in his home Near Lebanon, MO at the age of ninety-four years. One would be hard pressed to find a finer man than Lowell. He spent a greater part of his life working for school systems in and around Lebanon, MO. In fact a great part of the population in Lebanon had him either as a teacher or Principal. The night of visitation scores of people waited in line to pay their respects to this man who had touched their life in ways no other person had. In later years it was my privilege to ordain him as an elder of the Lees Summit congregation, where he served faithfully for many years. Lowell had a disposition you had to like. He was mild mannered, polite, easy to approach, and as genuine a person as you could find. His earthly remains were laid to rest in the New Hope Cemetery not far from his house where so many of the saints in that area await the resurrection. Lowell is survived by his wife of sixty nine years Nadine, a daughter Carol Branstetter and her husband Frank, two sons, Kurt Richardson and his wife Leta and Kendall Richardson, and his wife Sara along with several grandchildren, sisters, nieces and nephews. He will be greatly missed by all those who were close to him. It is a joy to know, however, that his influence will live on in the lives of those knew and loved him for years yet to come. —Ronny Wade

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THE BACK PAGE...

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO OFFER?

By CARL M. JOHNSON

A young family of five recently visited our Lord's Day morning worship services. We greeted the family warmly and welcomed them to our assembly. As we visited, the parents asked about classes for their children and appeared shocked when we explained we have no classes, but we hoped they would enjoy and benefit from our services. Before the song service was completed, the family gathered up their belongings and left the building. Obviously, they were not interested in what we have to offer.

A couple of years ago a woman moved here and settled near our church building. She visited our services and indicated she is a member of the church and would be worshipping with us permanently. She has a grown son living in the area, but he and his family never accompanied the woman to our worship services. Her job required her to travel a lot so she was gone over weekends on occasion. Not long ago, however, she was missing from worship for several weeks and we became concerned. One of the sisters in the church saw her downtown one day and asked where she had been. She sheepishly explained, "Well, my son and his family want me to attend a larger church that has more to offer than you have. I hated to leave because all of you have been so nice to me." We have not seen her since.

I could recount dozens of stories just like these two—people who have come through our doors and have left us because they have found churches down the road that have "more to offer."

The dilemma is not ours alone, however. David Tant says, "The religious world is one of fierce competition—just like the world of car sales. Dealerships compete by offering friendly salespeople, an up-to-date service center, free-loaners, and comfortable waiting rooms. Sometimes we treat churches the same way. I get calls asking what our congregation offers. Do we have a sports program? A youth minister? Day care? A mothers morning out program? Divorce recovery? Praise bands? Are you a full-service church?" (Christian Chronicle Jan. 2018).

Tant's words certainly resonate with me. I am just waiting for someone to ask, "How many people does your building comfortably sleep?" (Asked as though looking to buy a new yacht).

A denominational preacher makes the following observation about his own brotherhood, "We have created the 'Low Impact-High Maintenance Believer' (LHMB). They are a monstrosity of the church growth movement (growth by any means necessary). How do I explain them? Think of the intensive care unit. There is a tube up the nose, and an IV in the arm pumping fluid or painkillers. There is a heart monitor and a breathing machine. They all serve the same purpose. They keep the patient alive...artificially. Many church programs do that today. The difference between hospital and church care is the machines in the hospital are for those who can't do for themselves...in the church, they are for those who WON'T do for themselves. Because they are fickle, they have started a price war between churches—discounted discipleship. Preachers compete to have the shortest service, most convenient parking, best coffee, and the least offensive sermon. Suddenly, church has become speed-dating. We now have an odd irony. Church used to be about getting people to God. Now it seems to be about protecting them from God" (M. Murillo).

Murillo makes the same observation about the Church Growth Movement that John MacArthur made 25 years ago in his book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*.

The apostle Paul warned us, "For the time will come when they 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" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Still, we are forced to take a hard look at ourselves when we see other churches using gimmicks to entice big crowds, and people leaving our ranks because we just do not have enough to offer. What do we have to offer?

We offer the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because it contains power and life (Rom. 1:16). We offer worship in Spirit and Truth (Jn. 4:24). The apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers are just as effective for our worship today as they were in the First Century (Acts 2:42). We also offer a brotherhood of loving fellowship (Jn. 15:12).

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul uses "godliness" to refer to true religion (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3-6, 11; Tit. 1:1). He says there is a life-changing, soul-saving power inherent in true religion. But, when Christian pretenders deny that power in exchange for gimmicks, Paul says to let them go. Turn away from them (2 Tim. 3:5). Drain the swamp. Honest hearted seekers, however, will find our offer to be one they simply cannot refuse. cmjthebackpage@gmail.com