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THE OLD PATHS

R. H. Boll

“Thus saith Jehovah, 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” (Jer. 6:16.)

It was a strange message that Jeremiah uttered, and it broke like a shrill, discordant trumpet blast into the music of those times. Nearly a thousand years had passed since Israel first began their national existence in the land. They had progressed mightily during that time: they had seen much, heard much, learned much in the course of the centuries. They had been emancipated (as they thought) from many crude, primitive beliefs, and had risen above many childish superstitions which their forefathers had so devoutly held. They had made contact with neighboring nations, and had stricken hands with the children of foreigners, and they were tilled with customs from the East. All this had broadened their outlook and greatly enriched their intellectual social life. They held advanced ideas and views of the world and of religion. But, like a raucous bugle-blast, the voice of God's prophet broke into their pleasing dreams: “Ask for the old ways, where is the good way, and walk therein—” and you will find there something that you haven't got now—something you once had and lost: *rest of the soul*.

Of course they indignantly turned it down. “We will not walk therein,” they said. Jeremiah was away behind the times, an old fogy, a fossil, a moss-back, a reactionary. Well, let him talk; we will go right on advancing and progressing. And so they did—they kept on progressing until the last hope was gone and Jeremiah's heart broke in lament over the ruined nation. For who can stop a people in their madness?

The same situation exists again and the same call comes to us in our day—the call to go back to the old paths, to the good way, and to walk therein. It seems strange that with all the progress that has been made in the world the good way we hope to find is not before us but far back, among the old paths. Who can believe it? The great struggle for light and truth, man's laborious search for the ultimate good—was all that in vain? Moreover the facts seem to belie the thought. Think of all that mankind has achieved—the tremendous forward step, for instance, that came with the invention of printing, and the consequent preservation and dissemination of knowledge; the new era that dawned at the Reformation; the spread of civilization, of culture, and of learning; the discoveries and inventions, that have ameliorated human life

and lot; the great strides of advancement in every brand of science—in surgery and medicine, in hygiene, in sanitation, in agriculture, in transportation, in methods of locomotion, in rapid communication—in fact in everything. Probably no other fifty years in all human history has seen such changes as has the last half-century. Old things and old ideas are constantly being outmoded and discarded on every hand. The words “modern” and “scientific” are words to conjure by; whereas all that is old is considered antiquated and worthless. Who would want to go back to old times and ways? And why, in the midst of all this universal progress, should we heed the call to return to the old paths? And as a further thought—why should not all this new light and learning affect religion as well? The “faith of our fathers”—may have served well enough in their day—but why should the enlightened new generation be bound to ancient views and notions? Accordingly we see and hear much of the “New Theology,” the “Religion of the Future,” and of “Modern Faith”; and the apostles of the modern Liberalism tell us kindly how to sift the good out of all the age-old rubbish, and how to build ourselves statelier mansions for our souls.

And through all this Babel of modern voices, and all the artificial rush and clatter of our day rings again the call of God’s word, “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.”

Now it was not in the prophet’s mind to deny the benefit of human progress for its ends. There are two evident facts to be considered. The first is that everything man can make or do, man can also improve upon. All history, and especially that of the recent years, demonstrates that fact. The other is that everything which God has made is perfect for its end and cannot be improved upon. For example, there are people now living who have witnessed the evolution of our modern lighting, from tallow candle to paraffin candle, to coal-oil lamp, to fishtail gas burner, to Welsbach mantle, to incandescent globe, to Mazda lamps, to flourescent lights. These marked great and rapid strides of improvement. But morning by morning God’s great lamp is hung in the heavens, of which no man has ever devised an improvement: it is as marvellous now as it was in the day of Creation. And so it is with all of God’s works. What He has made and has given us is perfect for its purpose. Now the good old way which men are bidden to seek is of God’s workmanship and devising. Salvation is of Jehovah, and cannot be improved upon. In fact what is called “religion” always (and quickly) deteriorates in man’s hands. The Law, for example, was given from Sinai; but soon man corrupted the pure teaching of God. In Jeremiah’s time they had far departed from it, and had

altered and marred God's service and worship past recognition; and though after the Captivity a new beginning was made, it was not long before again the changes and corruptions crept in—so that in Christ's time the truth had become largely encrusted and hidden under human tradition. "Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition," said the Lord Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees, "... but in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men." (Matt. 15:6, 9.)

The same is true of Christianity. Soon the pure, limpid river of truth which had at first flowed forth crystal clear from the fount of inspiration became fouled by men's feet. What is called "historic Christianity" today, along with other various forms of faiths of Christendom, is now so changed and adulterated, modified by human creeds and customs and ceremonies, as to be unrecognizable. Religion has indeed "progressed," but it has not improved the light of God's truth, but has obscured and hidden it. Who would find God's way must go back—back to the old paths—not back a hundred years, nor even a thousand years, nor to the "Early Fathers"—but back to the Cross and the Open Tomb, back to Christ and the apostles, back to the original preaching of the gospel, as it was given through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. There shall we find the good way, and rest for the soul.

Nineteen hundred years have passed—eventful years and full of many sorts of progress; but they have not given us another Jesus. None like Him has ever been found or heard of; nor has even the imagination of poets and literary artists ever been able to picture character comparable to Him. There is but one Jesus, and to Him must men return. None lived as He lived; none ever died as He died; and no other ever "Conquered sin, hell, and the grave"—none but Jesus only. And there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. We must go back to Him. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever.

There has never been but the one gospel that was preached; and that gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. To alter that original gospel is to incur the curse. "But though we," says Paul, "or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." (Gal. 1:8.) Those who would be saved must go back to that gospel.

In all the ages of human progress no substitute has ever been found for the Blood of Christ. It is still the only thing that can make the conscience clean, and bring peace to the sin-burdened soul. And nothing has been invented that can take the place of the Cross, it still towers o'er the wrecks of time. Nor has there been any improvement on the simple way in which sinners came to avail themselves of it in the begin-

ning Mk. 16:15, 16; Acts 16:30; Rom.10:9, 10; Acts 2:38; Sin is the same as it ever was, and repentance has not been modernized; and human need and wretchedness have not yielded to any modern formulas.

So also the simple church of the Lord that was established on Pentecost still stands, and the Lord still adds to it such as are being saved even as He did long ago (Acts 2:47). Still the worship that is well-pleasing to God is the simple, sincere worship of the early Christians, as described in Acts 2:42 and elsewhere in the New Testament. Also to the hope which the Lord Jesus and His apostles so earnestly held up with warning and promise to the disciples of that day — the hope of Christ's return from heaven — we must turn.

Back, back to the old paths, to the good way let us return. It is the only remedy for the confusion of our time, and our one hope of salvation; we must contend earnestly for the faith which was "*once for all* delivered to the saints." (Jude 3.) "As for you," says John the beloved apostle, "let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father." (1 John 2:24.) There lies the good way, and there ye shall find rest to your souls.

SIGNPOSTS MARKING THE WAY HOME

Read and Heed!

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.—Mark 16:15, 16.

Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.—Acts 2:38.

If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.—Romans 10:9.

EXCEPT ye believe I am he, ye shall die in your sins.—John 8:24.

EXCEPT ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.—Luke 13:5.

EXCEPT one be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.—John 3:5.

BELIEVE in the gospel; REPENT of your sins! CONFESS Him before men; be BAPTIZED; WALK IN THE WILL OF THE LORD.