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Is it ever right to do what former generations considered improper?

or, "A plea for the old paths"

"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.

The drift that takes place amongst the professing people of God from generation to generation is a matter of Biblical record. Who, as a serious student of God's Word, has not read with trembling the words found in Judges chapter 2?

"And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. . . . And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel," Judges 2:7, 10.

That sad occurrence has been repeated within the history of God's people, right up to our own time when I fear we are seeing the very same malady breaking forth again amongst us.

Our rule of faith is, of course, not the actions and standards of past generations, no matter how honourable and upright we may consider them to have been. No, it is ever and always the Word of God alone which is our authority in what we are to believe and what we are to do.

However, before we cast aside the views and standards of our godly forebears, we had better have a very strong Bible-based argument for doing so!

Whenever spiritual, moral or social innovations are proposed, somewhere in the preface of such proposals you will find the phrase: "TIMES CHANGE!"

Yes, they do indeed but the changes promoted by, "CHANGING TIMES", are invariably such that a God-fearing believer will utterly reject. The fact that human society is ever in a state of moral flux is no basis for the believer to keep step with the changes. The changes that "THE TIMES" bring are born of time whereas the Christian's standards and principles of behaviour are born of God and eternity!

Whenever there is a departing from the behavioural norms of former generations and a lowering of Christian standards it is down to one thing - a spirit of BACKSLIDING!

It may be dressed up and camouflaged under many guises and excused as harmless and practised by increasing numbers of individuals, but BACKSLIDING it is and harmless it most certainly is not, no matter how many embrace the new way.

Backsliding is a process that may begin with an apparently innocuous act or word but it will, without exception, take the soul into entanglements which will work ruin and misery. Achan's journey to the terrible scene in the Valley of Achor, where he perished under the judgment of God with all his family, began with a "look"! (Joshua 7:21.)

When David remained in his palace and neglected to accompany his army to the field of battle, it initiated a chain of events which included lies, lust, hypocrisy, adultery and murder. Furthermore, it had terrible consequences for him, his family and for the nation for generations to come.

No, BACKSLIDING is never harmless!

Invariably, the innovations arising from the "CHANGING OF THE TIMES" entail a REVERTING to the practices and behaviour, which in most cases if not all, were rejected as worldly and wrong by former generations of



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believers. Sadly, in many cases, those now turning back did but a short time ago, reject the ways they are once again embracing.

How sad to see a woman, who following her conversion to Christ, threw away the cosmetics and the hair dye and the paint pots so beloved of the world, only to dig them up again in response to the follies of others, and decorate herself in a fashion she recently repudiated as sinful and God-dishonouring!!

She may call it "MOVING WITH THE TIMES" but in truth it is BACKSLIDING.

How sad to see husbands and fathers, ministers and elders, who have publicly disavowed such worldly behaviour in the past, now silently acquiescing in such behaviour within their families or the flock of God. They, as head of the family or an officer in the house of God, are participating in and indeed the encouraging and assisting of this backsliding, to say the least, by his silence.

We all, I am sure, delight in that hymn by Albert B. Simpson which contains the refrain:

Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same;
All may change, but Jesus never— Glory to His name!
Glory to His name, Glory to His name.
All may change, but Jesus never— Glory to His name!

Horatius Bonar refers to the same unchangeableness in Christ in one of his hymns which contains the verses:

My love is oftentimes low,
My joy still ebbs and flows;
But peace with Him remains the same—
No change Jehovah knows.

I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

The immutability of God is a glorious truth prominent in the Bible.

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you," Exodus 3:14.

In this revelation of Himself to Moses, God sets forth, as John Gill states it, "His self-existence, and that he is the Being of beings; as also it denotes His eternity and immutability, and His constancy and faithfulness in fulfilling His promises, for it includes all time, past, present, and to come; and the sense is, not only I am what I am at present, but I am what I have been, and I am what I shall be, and shall be what I am."

Consider these verses which repeat this wonderful truth about our unchanging and unchangeable God.

- "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed," Malachi 3:6.



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- "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever," Hebrews 13:8.
- "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty," Revelation 1:8.
- "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last," Revelation 22:13.

God is bound to His people by the terms of an unchanging and unchangeable covenant. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant," Hebrews 13:20.

God is bound to that covenant and its laws provide us with the standards we are to follow as our path through life. God's standards of holiness and morality do not, cannot change.

Therefore, in truth, the standards of rectitude and decency of 2000 years ago, remain unchanged for believers.

"But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy," 1 Peter 1:15-16.

The unchanging holiness of our unchanging God is the requirement and precept we must adopt and follow.

THAT PRECLUDES ADOPTING THE CHANGING WAYS OF TIME!

We glory in the truth that God does not change. It is a fountain-head of comfort and strength in the midst of trial.

That being so, why do we embrace that which takes us away from the paths that the unchanging Jehovah led His people upon in times past?

The views and standards of God on decency, modesty and behavioural propriety remain "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever," Hebrews 13:8.

Two thousand years ago, the Lord decreed through His servant Paul: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God," Romans 12:2.

Here are the two "currents of change" at work amongst men. Here is the ebb and flow of moral modification that mankind is subjected to.

There is that "CONFORMING TO THE WORLD" which is the outworking of the impulses of the base and sinful nature of man.

There is also that "TRANSFORMING AND RENEWING OF THE MIND" which is the outworking of God's sanctifying grace by the Holy Spirit in the soul of the redeemed believer.

The latter never will work a returning to the ways and behaviour from which the believer was delivered by the grace and power of the God at conversion.

The former will never promote that which is in accordance with "that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

These two forces work in opposite directions, promoting utterly diverse objectives. They are the opposing forces of Heaven and Hell.

If we find ourselves drawn back to the ways of Egypt, call it what we may, it is BACKSLIDING!



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If the demoniac of Gadara reverted to crying and cutting himself, casting away his clothing and abandoning his seat at the Saviour's feet, what would we call it? Surely it would not be deemed acceptable behaviour but rather BACKSLIDING. He was relapsing into the satanic domain from which he had been delivered.

It is not for nothing that God is pleased to call the paths upon which He would have His people ever walk THE OLD PATHS.

Some are showing signs of deserting that old path for the path from which mercy delivered them. What can be found on such a road but misery, shame and disaster?

Would you lead your children and the rising generation onto such a path? Would we take a lead in encouraging people to forsake the ways of righteousness?

Would you abandon the ways of the God Who has bestowed such mercies upon you and thus declare that you have found some fault in Him, that He somehow has failed you and that justifies your turning your back upon Him?

Would you tell the sinner that the world is better than Canaan and the kingdom into which grace has translated you?

"And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods," Joshua 24:16.

The timeless words of Charles Wesley come to mind.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

How prone we are to wander! How we defy the inward spring of love to God that every true believer has! We pull back from the Lord Who purchased our redemption and mingle with the worldlings and soon we are acting and speaking just like them, John 18:18, Mark 14:71.

Let us remember the enduring words of Hebrews 10:38. "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." The word translated "draw back" means to "shun". How often that marks the backslider? They begin to "shun" the company of believers, the prayer meeting, the Sabbath services. The things of God cease to have a place in their affections that once they had.

May the changes some are seen to be embracing be recognised for what they are and rejected by all and boldly denounced from our pulpits and may the spirit seen in the days of Ezra be active amongst us today.

"Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of



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those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it," Ezra 10:1-4.

Departure from God is symptomatic of forgetting God. Forgetfulness in truth is linked to a diminishing love for Christ.

In the heart of the devout believer, love carries a vivid portrait of the Saviour upon the heart. The eyes of the soul are constantly engaged in "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith," Hebrews 12:2.

But as love declines the eyes dim, the gaze is "drawn away of his own lust, and enticed," James 1:14, and the Saviour fades from the consciousness.

The eyes are focused on that which has drawn away our heart's affection.

Thus the backslider is frequently represented as facing away from the Lord. Psalm 80 sets forth this image of backsliding. "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved," verse 3.

The matter is more vividly illustrated in Ezekiel 8:16-17.

"And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose."

What a provocation of God backsliding is. Backsliders would not remain long in their complacency if they had but some idea of the anger they arouse in the heart of God by their folly and defiance.

The church at Ephesus was threatened with judgment because of its loss of love for the Lord and the resultant forgetting of Him. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent," Revelation 2:4-5.

We need to see a recovery of our first love and an end to our forgetfulness. The only cure for our ills is Calvary. We need to return there and see the Saviour in His love dying for us.

King of my life, I crown Thee now,
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.

*Lest I forget Gethsemane;
Lest I forget Thine agony;
Lest I forget Thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary.*

Show me the tomb where Thou wast laid,
Tenderly mourned and wept;
Angels in robes of light arrayed
Guarded Thee whilst Thou slept.

Let me like Mary, thro' the gloom,
Come with a gift to Thee;
Show to me now the empty tomb,
Lead me to Calvary.

May I be willing, Lord, to bear
Daily my cross for Thee;
Even Thy cup of grief to share—
Thou hast borne all for me.



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A return to Calvary where our love for Christ will be rekindled and our desire for the world and its ways crucified is the Church's need of the hour!

Let us heed the call of God to our generation coming down to us from nearly 3000 years ago.

"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," Jeremiah 6:16.

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1st August 2013.