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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.

I sent this verse to some friends earlier today as we were recalling former times.

Later I found my heart pondering just what the verse said and decided to share with you the following few thoughts.

I trust that you find them helpful.

These words were uttered by Jeremiah when the populace, under the guidance of false prophets, were suffering the consequences of their folly. These evil prophets offered what appeared to be a good way but it brought nothing but a terrible harvest.

"They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace," Verse 14.

Peace was what the people desired and longed for but sadly they refused God's offer of true peace and settled for the empty, base, merely spurious national health and prosperity the charlatans promised. How loud were they in their proclamations! 'Peace, peace' they shouted. But it was mere hot air.

Such have ever been the arrogant declarations of false prophets. Surely that must be clear to us here in Ulster. In a day when we see bullying Irish Republicanism dominating the affairs of the Province with IRA terrorists calling the political shots and openly dismissing and disregarding the rule of law, ought we not to recognise that this is the 'PEACE'" that ecumenical false prophets promised!

There are many who must share in the responsibility for bringing this shameful misery upon our land but above all it is that group of deceivers who sold Ulster the bogus hope of Ecumenism!

Please note some simple thoughts from this verse.

I. THE RIGHT WAY IS AN OLD WAY!

Just how old are the 'old paths'? I can say that they are as old as God Himself. "And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God," Genesis 21:33. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God," Psalm 90:2.

That means His words are everlasting also! "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," Matthew 24:35.

There is no change to be expected in the ways by which we walk with God and worship Him. 'Change and alteration' is the 'modus operandi' of mankind! The changes sought by men are always for evil. It is for this reason we are warned against those 'given to change'. "My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change," Proverbs 24:21. When man changes anything that is of a spiritual nature he corrupts and perverts it. Indeed the word change in Proverbs 24:21 is linked with 'perversion'. "Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted," Proverbs 31:5. Here the word is translated 'pervert'.



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Is there anything of God's that men have not sought to change, and that for something wicked! "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient," Romans 1:22-23, 25-28.

This is the sad record of man's abandonment of the 'old paths' which is rapidly advancing today with satanic energy.

II. IT IS IN THESE 'OLD PATHS' ALONE THAT GOOD IS FOUND

The word 'good' in our verse is the one the Lord uses of His creative work. "And God saw the light, that it was good," Genesis 1:4 and also 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. The 'old paths' will lead us to that which is 'good' in God's eyes.

That is important to recognise. We cannot please the Lord EXCEPT we are following the 'old paths'! Step outside of them, no matter how earnest and sincere we may consider our endeavours to be we are engaging in that which is NOT good. Our actions are offensive to the Lord.

It was for this reason that the Lord said of Israel, those who had 'rebelled', 'forsaken the Lord' and 'gone away backward' (Isaiah 1:2, 4,): "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. . . . o what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them," 11-14.

Man's abandoning of the ways of God had so corrupted the ordinances of God that they made of them a vain thing and abominable in God's eyes.

We can say that, by and large, of the 'Christianity' of today! Man has tampered, altered tweaked and perverted the 'right ways of the Lord' so that that which is considered 'Christianity' is, in truth, an abomination. It is Isaiah 1:14 all over again!

Proud man thinks he can take the ways of God and make them better than did the Lord. For this reason today's 'Christianity' bears little or no likeness to that set forth in the Word of God.

How many 'evangelicals' promote new ways and promise blessing and revival if their ways are followed! They would acknowledge that their ways bear no likeness to the ways that God has blessed in the past - the ways of the prophets, the reformers and martyrs. Indeed, they boast in their innovations and banning of the old paths of the Bible! How they speak of God and refer to Him; how they conduct services and dress as they present themselves before God, is utterly different from former times when reverence, modesty, humility and sobriety marked the house of God and the gatherings of His people.

It is all 'change' in modern 'evangelicalism'!

The result is false fire and ashes where once there was the holy flame of God's blessing!



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III. THE OLD PATHS CAN ONLY BE ENJOYED AGAIN AFTER THEY ARE SOUGHT.

It is clear from the text that those addressed by Jeremiah had LOST SIGHT of the old paths! There are four words that need to be noted in regards to this matter.

Stand. They had to stop and cease going down the path they were on. There can never be an enjoying again of God's blessing unless we STOP pursuing the new ways and standards of today's 'Christianity'! We must stop and take heed to what the Lord is saying!

See. We must open our eyes to where it is we have been heading, the erroneous path we have been treading. Disobedience to God entails blindness. Paul explained to the Ephesians just why the Gentiles were as they were. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness," Ephesians 4:18-19. Departing from God means departing from light. Holiness means walking in the light of the Lord's presence. "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life," John 8:12. All is darkness outside of the old paths!

Ask. Recognising the wrongness of the path we are on, we ask the Lord to lead us back to the right path. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people," Exodus 13:21-22. The pictures of what is required of us are there for us to see in the Bible.

We need, in childlikeness, to acknowledge that our sinful pride has caused us to wander astray into trouble and sorrow and, furthermore, like lost sheep, we don't know the way home! Oh how I recall the simple prayers of long ago, as those recently delivered out of the entanglements of ecumenical denominations gathered to pray and cry to the Lord to lead them on with Himself. The very memory of it all stirs and blesses my soul!

Walk. Ah yes, now having asked we must obey and walk in the 'old paths' again. That is what happened at the Reformation. That is what happened in the times of revival our nation has enjoyed! Those were times when the 'old paths' were rediscovered by the mercy of God and multitudes began to walk in them.

Is that not what the redeemed of the Lord should be seeking for today.

Find. There is something to be found in the 'old paths'. It is 'rest for your souls'. The word 'rest' appears only here in the Old Testament.

There is something very unique about that which is found upon the 'old paths'! It cannot be found anywhere else. This world with all its pleasures and vanities cannot provide this 'rest'!

It is a spiritual rest for it is the soul that experiences it. Mankind craves such a rest though it knows it not! The booze, the drugs, the pleasure-seeking, the profligacy - all are indulged in in order to find that which the 'old paths' alone provide!

The old hymn puts it well.

Out of my bondage, sorrow, and night,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into Thy freedom, gladness, and light,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of my sickness into Thy health,
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,



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Out of my sin and into Thyself,
Jesus, I come to Thee!

2 Out of my shameful failure and loss,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into the glorious gain of Thy cross,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of earth's sorrows into Thy balm,
Out of life's storm and into Thy calm,
Out of distress to jubilant psalm,
Jesus, I come to Thee!

3 Out of unrest and arrogant pride,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into Thy blessed will to abide,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of myself to dwell in Thy love,
Out of despair into raptures above,
Upward for aye on wings like a dove,
Jesus, I come to Thee!

4 Out of the fear and dread of the tomb,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into the joy and pleasure, Thine own,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of the depths of ruin untold,
Into the flock Thy love doth enfold,
Ever Thy glorious face to behold,
Jesus, I come to Thee!

Freedom, gladness, and light are to be found only in the 'old paths' of God's Truth!

IV. IT MUST BE NOTICED THAT THE 'OLD PATHS' ARE NOT POPULAR!

The verse ends with what man did in response to God's call. "But they said, We will not walk therein." They were determined to continue on in defiance of God. Sadly, I seem to see more of that spirit abroad than I do of a stopping, seeing, asking, walking and a finding of the blessings of spiritual rest.

There was a boldness in these words! "We will not walk therein" That was was some 30 years prior to the judgment of God upon Jerusalem, when it was destroyed by the Babylonian army. It was likely early in the reign of Josiah (1:2) when there was something of a turning unto the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:32-33) but yet this rebellious spirit dominated the age. About the same time as the words of our text were uttered, Jeremiah wrote: "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD," 3:10. Even in the days of Josiah's revivals, there was a half-hearted, a sham seeking after the Lord by many, many of Judah. It is to be noted that Josiah the king was dominant



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in that time of reformation. Josiah "caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand" up for the Covenant which the king made. But just how many were genuinely moved to obedience would seem to be small given what the Lord said in the verse quoted (Jeremiah 3:10). It is evident that the nation soon returned to its old sins following the death of Josiah at 39 years of age. Three months after his death, his son Eliakim was made king. He became known as Jehoiakim. It is said of him: "Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God," 2 Chronicles 36:5. That tells us that even the royal family remained corrupt during the times of good under Josiah.

The spirit that prevailed and that to which the nation returned despite the good influences of Josiah, was one of utter defiance of God. "We will not walk therein," was the attitude of the people.

Has there been any improvement in Ulster of late. Whatever blessing and revivings we in the Free Presbyterian Church experienced in the 60s-70s, has it continued on today? I think not! Rather, the temperament and character of today is that of those who said: "We will not walk therein."

Evidence of the general spirit of apostasy abroad in the United Kingdom, and further afield, is seen in the defiance of the rules brought in to safeguard the populace from Covid-19. There have been demonstrations, protests and riots by those who refuse to comply. The socialising, drinking, partying and gathering to engage in boisterous activities have abounded.

No, there is little or no interest in returning to the 'old paths', even amongst those who profess faith in Christ. This is an age of "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries," 1 Peter 4:3. There is a call goes out to the sincere Christian in such a day. "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," Romans 13:11-14.

This is what it means to walk in the 'old paths'! But there will be few to join you Christian, if you determine to obey God and return to those paths.

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