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# The Old Paths

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## “Comforting The Lost”

Dickey Howard, Florence, AL

Today many are studying hard to find a minimum for being saved in order to condone and embrace certain sins and error. This is being accomplished by putting a touch of “gray” on many black and white passages that teach the necessity of baptism, the sinfulness of adultery, etc. Some use “I THINK” for authority, while covering everything else with love or Romans 14. We know lowering the standard will yield larger numbers, and cause less strife and discomfort. This type of behavior is what we have come to expect from the liberal ranks and denominations. But, there are some in the “conservative” ranks that are getting caught up in this kind of thinking. How can we expect to save the lost if we try to make them feel comfortable in their sins?

A very important point to remember when “seeking the lost” is to identify them, and get them to see their condition. This can not be accomplished by preaching and teaching only “generic” type lessons. For example, it is neither hard nor controversial to preach that those who don’t obey God will be lost. Who are these lost that obey not God? I do not know of any religious person who does not believe they are obeying God. Thus, this general type preaching does not make them see their need of repentance and baptism. Yet, we have some that will say, “Just preach against the error and don’t call any names.” This is a comfort

to those in sin. Nathan told David a story to get him to see his sin with Bathsheba, but finally had to point blank tell him, “*Thou art the man*” (II Sam. 12:7).

I was in attendance in a Bible class when an elder, of a “conservative” congregation, was asked, “Are our liberal brethren in need of repentance?” This elder said, “I would be afraid to say, because they did the same thing to be saved we did.” Then, there are those not as open with what they believe. They will talk for 30 minutes without ever really telling you what they believe (actually riding the fence). Both of these positions are a comfort to those needing repentance.

There are some who find it difficult to say that those who teach error are in need of repentance (II Jn. 9-11). Instead, they have spent much time searching for authority to embrace the teacher. This is nothing less than comforting the sinner while he remains in his sin.

Where is all this type of thinking and practice taking us? Many can recall when no congregation with the name “church of Christ” on the building would join with denominations for anything. Not long ago one could not hear of anyone of the Lord’s Church taking the name of Christ from their sign. No congregation of God’s people would have marched for Jesus along side the denominations. Mixed worship with those who don’t even believe in baptism for the remission of sins was

unheard of. But now, we see more and more mixing of some who wear the name of Christ with those of the denominational world. This is a seal of approval and a comfort to the denominational world. Yes, it seems the more liberal churches are the only ones doing this at present, but only a few years back they weren’t doing these things either. Let us not use battles won or the “conservative” name to give us a false sense of security against apostasy! If you believe “we” can’t drift, just take a good honest look around you.

We need to pull out old articles written about the institutional division and see how far we have drifted in such a short period. When I read such articles, I can not read about any “conservative” congregation as having preachers or members who had a problem identifying the lost or erring. I have not read of any of those “conservative” congregations that comforted the lost in their sins. I can not read of any of those “conservative” congregations studying to find ways to embrace those in sin or error. But, I can read about many parting relationships with friends, neighbors and even family for the sake of truth. They clearly understood that those in congregations of the Lord’s church who were doing things without Bible authority needed to repent. They knew those who had not been baptized for the remission of sins (whoever) needed to repent and be baptized, and said so. They knew the meaning of II John 9-11. They understood when a brother taught error he erred, being a false teacher, and needed to repent. The “conservative” congregations spoke against sin and error using plain speech.

Yes, the lines were clearly drawn and

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many of those preachers and members stayed in “trouble” because of their stand for the truth. Brother, have you been confronted lately because of your stand for the truth, or do all men speak well of you? Jesus talked about this in Luke 6:26.

It is time we looked again at the meaning of “conservative”. Webster’s dictionary defines conservative: (1) tending to conserve, or preserve, preservative. (2) Disposed to keep things as they are. When we call ourselves “conservative” we say we are striving to be like the church described in the New Testament.

Let us remember, the first century church was militant, and their preaching named the sinner along with the sin (II Tim. 4:10; 4:14). But, some today shy away from being militant by trying to keep a “low profile” in the name of church autonomy. Others are trying to use carnal weapons to fight a spiritual war. The first century church never used weapons such as psychology books, plays, skits, and dramas. The social gospel (which can be brought in without a kitchen or gym) was never used to bring folks to the spiritual. The weapons to win this spiritual war are found in Ephesians 6, not in the latest psychological theories or sales gimmicks.

Reading and hearing of such things going on puts me in mind of what an older preacher said to me. He said, “Some congregations could pack up and move away and it would be a year before anyone missed them.” The 2 tribes of Israel that stayed on the east side of Jordan could not just sit back and watch the battle; neither can we and be pleasing to God.

No, we don’t hear of as many being baptized or restored as in the “old” days. Do you suppose it could be partly because we have made the sinner feel comfortable in his sins?

**Editor’s Note:**

Brother Howard is one of the good elders of the East Florence church of Christ in Florence, AL. I had the privilege to be in a meeting there earlier this year, and I must say I was very impressed with him as a man and as a shepherd of God’s people there. I hope that all of us will take to heart the words of this good elder. He has much wisdom and foresight, and he cries out as a watchman to warn God’s people of what is going on right under our noses!

Could it be that we have been guilty of allowing people to feel comfortable in their sins? A few weeks ago, there was an article printed expressing the fact that no greater injustice could be done to anyone than to leave them with the impression that they are saved, when, in fact, they are not! This is still true. Part of a preacher’s responsibility is to comfort the afflicted, but he is also to afflict the comfortable! Where do you stand, dear ones? Are we on the Lord’s side or not? Are we ready to “*Cry aloud and spare not...*”? Let us love people enough to want to show them the truth and lead them to Christ before it is too late.

## “No Pressure”

Jarrod Jacobs

In thinking about brother Howard’s article, it brought to mind a phrase I have heard quite often. Sometimes, we talk with people about the Bible, and they say, “Don’t pressure me.” Often one teaching will say, “This is not to pressure you, but ...”. While it is certainly not anyone’s intention to force a person to obey the Lord, nor to “pressure” them into doing something that they do not wish to do, there is something to be said for pressure being applied in the right way.

We know physically that pressure is a warning that some part of the body is in stress or trauma. It is something given by God to protect us from further harm. (Ex: The boy felt great pressure in his hand, so he pulled it from the vise. Or, the girl experienced great pressure after her arm was broken.) In other words, pressure can be a good thing when applied correctly. One feeling such pressure physically will take measures to prevent further harm to the body if this is possible.

Spiritually, it is no different. If someone wishes to speak to you about the Bible, and you feel “pressure,” perhaps it is because you’re in the wrong! Instead of fighting against this, why not take steps to get yourself out of spiritual jeopardy (i.e., repent), and prevent further spiritual damage by returning to the Lord now while you can.

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**Preacher/Editor:** Jarrod Jacobs

**Phone:** (270) 683-5386

**Website address:** [www.southside-churchofchrist.com](http://www.southside-churchofchrist.com) (Updated weekly!)

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