

# The Old Paths

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## “Luck, Fate, Or Faith?”

Mike Thomas, Owensboro, KY

I was born into a family with a mother who was converted to Christ when I was 4-years-old. As a result of her determination to find God’s will, she obeyed the gospel and attended faithfully a congregation that practiced the same pattern of Christianity found in the Bible. This gave me and my siblings the opportunity to “grow up” in a church that did not rely human creeds or earthly organizations to oversee the church. There were no female preachers, instrumental music or speaking in tongues. We gave once a week and the Christians there partook of the Lord’s supper every Sunday. Their example and sincerity not only helped my mother remain faithful, they pointed her children in the right direction as well. And now, as I approach my 35th year on earth, I am still reaping the fruit of the faithful brethren in Baytown, Texas, whose love for the Lord provided many wonderful blessings for me and my family.

At about the time my mother was finding the truth of the gospel, there were other mothers in other parts of the world whose children were not as fortunate. They either lived in a society that emphasized human religions (Islam, Hinduism and the like), or they were born into a family that did not practice true Christianity. And now, as those children approach their 35th year on

earth, they are still without the knowledge that Jesus is the “chief cornerstone” of the Lord’s body: “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

My story is not unique. Many of you were also brought up in a home where New Testament Christianity was emphasized and practiced. You also attended churches that sought to restore the things taught by Christ and the apostles. And if you did not “grow up” in the church, you were likely converted by someone who had — and you are now a faithful member of the Lord’s body. If you’re like me, I’m sure you have often wondered about the fate of those born into a family or society where Christianity was not emphasized. What happens to the children of China, Africa and Iraq who never hear the Bible taught as openly as it is in America? Or what about the children in America born into families that either practice error or do not emphasize any faith in Christ? Will they be eternally lost for not obeying the gospel? Is salvation just a matter of luck, fate and fortune?

The only way I have been able to make sense of this is to believe God’s promise to mankind: “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Ps. 145:18). See also James 4:7-8. One of the purposes of creation was so that men “should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him,

though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). When man does decide to grope for God, is it unreasonable to expect God to provide him with an opportunity to find Him? Didn’t Jesus promise to open the door of His will if we knock on it (Matt. 7:7-8)? Why then would I doubt God’s ability to give honest souls an opportunity to hear the truth, if they are truly seeking Him? “What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread will give him a stone?”

I realize that doesn’t change the fact that there are likely souls who die without hearing the gospel. In such cases, I will let God be the judge, since He alone is the “one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (Jas. 4:12). God is ultimately the judge of all mankind, anyway, separate and apart from our opinion. However, He has given us some insight into the kind of judgment awaiting those who do not obey the gospel (II Thess. 1:7). Will the same be true for those born without the advantages most of us have had in America or in Christian homes? I’ll leave that one to the Lawgiver. It seems to me, though, that a person has to ignore all intelligence to pass through this life without a knowledge of God.

God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4). To accomplish this, He has preserved the knowledge of His will for mankind in the Bible (II Tim. 3:16-17). He has also given us a chance to learn this truth by instituting the work of faithful gospel preachers (Titus 1:3). If that is not enough, God has given testimony of His power and presence through the orderly arrangement of creation (Rom. 1:20), which has the ability to speak volumes to honest souls

*“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.” (Jer. 6:16)*

(Ps. 19:2). With all of these avenues available, is it reasonable to believe man can live on earth without learning of God? If anything, would we not have to close our eyes to all the evidence around us (Ps. 53:1)?

God has shown us through the conversions of the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius that if anyone wants to find the truth, He will provide them with an opportunity to learn it (Acts 8:26-39; 10:1-48). He will not speak to His preachers as He did to Phillip and Peter in sending them to the eunuch and Cornelius, but He will provide us with "doors" to teach the lost when we ask for them (Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8). How then can I think He will not do the same today for those who grope for Him? If He opens doors for the teachers, why would He not open those same doors for the seekers?

Salvation is not a matter of luck, fate or good timing. It comes as a result of people groping for Him (Jn. 6:44-45), which is not determined by chance or environment. My mother's obedience may have provided me with the opportunity to hear the gospel at a young age, but I am no different than the boy born into an unbelieving family. We both must seek the Lord with all of our heart to find Him. No one has an easy ride in finding the truth, but neither is anyone left out. For, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

## What Will YOU Do?

After spending time in God's word, a question we must ask

ourselves is, "What will you do with the information you now have?" The Bible challenges men and women to apply the facts they have learned to their lives. It is not enough to have a knowledge of the truth and then refuse to obey it. James says that the "blessed" man is the one who "looks" into the "perfect law of liberty" and then "continues" in it! (Jas. 1:25)!

Therefore, what will you do with the knowledge you have gained in the last three months in your Bible study? Have you started to apply it and live it? I hope so! In addition to personal Bible studies, Bible classes, and worship times, we have had opportunities to attend a debate on baptism, as well as be involved in a three-day gospel meeting in the last three days. What have you learned through those studies? Christ encouraged men to "come ... and learn of me" (Matt. 11:28-29). Have we done this? If so, are we living what we have learned?

In this life, some folks will spend four or more years in college, and then go into a career that is nothing akin to what they studied. This may put food on the table, but please do not do this in your Bible study! After learning the truth, take the time to live what you have learned. Paul encouraged our living what we learn when he said, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21)! What will you do? -JJ

## Make A Note Of It....

Sometimes, folks wonder what our work is in a church that is fully organized. Due to a lack of understanding, some folks do nothing, while others take up for the "slack" by doing their work as well as other folk's work! What is our work in this church? Let the Bible answer this question.

- Elders — rule! (Heb. 13:7)
- Deacons — serve!  
(I Tim. 3:8-10, 13)
- Preachers — preach!  
(II Tim. 4:2)
- Members — submit!  
(Heb. 13:17)

Perhaps we thought our work in this church was more complicated than this. It is not! However, it increases in difficulty every day that we refuse to do our work! Contrast: I Cor. 15:58 -JJ

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### **MEETING TIMES:**

**Sunday Morning Bible Study** \_\_\_\_\_ **9:30 am**  
**Sunday Morning Worship** \_\_\_\_\_ **10:20 am**  
**Sunday Evening Worship** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:00 pm**  
**Wednesday Evening Bible Study** \_\_\_\_\_ **7:00 pm**

Our call-in radio program is on **WBIO, FM 94.7**, Sunday afternoon from 12:30-1:00 pm. **Call: 683-9246 (WBIO)** with your Bible question.

**Preacher/Editor:** Jarrod Jacobs  
**Elders:** Paul Dubois & Jeff Lankford  
**Phone:** (270) 683-5386

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