

ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS #1

I. Introduction

I am concerned about the condition of the current American culture. But I am even more concerned about the condition of the current American church. Why so? Because there is a connection between the condition of the church and the condition of the culture; God always begins with the Church! Over the next few weeks I want to give a word of Divine direction to help us know what to do in these turbulent times: a new series entitled 'Ask for the Old Paths'.

The title is taken from the Book of Jeremiah, a word God spoke to a nation that had backslidden itself into the judgments of God. I believe it applies to our nation today. This is the first message:

"A Prophetic Word for the American Church"

I have to explain what the term 'prophetic' means to me. I am not a prophet in the God has ever called me to forecast the future; But He does use me to interpret the present; like the men of the tribe of...

1 Chronicles 12:32

Issachar understood the times and knew what to do.

Here's how God worked with me for this series. I've been burdened for many months about the spiritual condition of our country. Watching the Gay Pride flag flown over the American embassy in Afghanistan grieved my spirit and I knew a disaster was coming for us in that country. Then there were the so-called 'Gay Pride' parades on our city streets. These public celebrations of the sin of homosexuality made me wonder how anyone can be 'proud' of being a homosexual???

That made me think about a verse God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah...

Jeremiah 6:15

"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall

among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down," says the Lord.

Just in the moment where I was bemoaning how history was repeating itself, and I was crying out about the condition of our country, I felt like the Spirit of the Lord said...READ THE NEXT VERSE and see what I said to My people...and that's how this series was born...

Jeremiah 6:16

Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls."

The New Living Translation calls them a nation at a crossroads...

Jeremiah 6:16 NLT

This is what the Lord says: "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.

God is telling us what we are to do as we stand at the crossroads in these evil days! He said, 'Ask for the Old Paths'. Now the question is, 'What did He mean?'

II. What Are The 'Old Paths'?

A. The Old Paths Are The Good Ways Our Godly Forefathers Walked Before Us

1. The 'old' paths have to do with our history; our roots; our foundations, and our connection with the preceding generations.

a. We no longer know who we are because we have forgotten where we came from; first as Christians, then as Americans.

2. We failed to see that the enemy of the 'old paths' are the 'new paths' of our own inventions and innovations.

Theme

The modern American church, infatuated with 'new paths', has forsaken the 'old paths', and now finds herself in decline.

3. This has come upon us because we tend to think that 'new' always means 'better'. It may be true of smartphones. But it's a fatal flaw for churches.

4. This is not new problem. A generation ago, the great C.S. Lewis warned about an obsession with newness. He called it 'Chronological Snobbery'.

C.S. Lewis

Chronological snobbery is the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.

5. Chronological snobbery is often quite common among the younger generation who see themselves as wiser and more enlightened than their elders.

6. The problem has accelerated in our modern times with the advent of technology and data surveys. We watched the so-called 'Church Growth Movement' become an industry.

- Churches are now run like corporations; they have business models
- Pastors operate like C.E.O.'s; many mega-church pastors are managers

Eugene Peterson

Pastors today are expected to run churches rather than care for souls. They are obsessed with keeping the current customers happy and luring new customers away from the religious shops down the street.

- If this sounds like a marketing competition between churches...it is!
- Testimony: I attended a couple of church growth conferences back in the late 1980' where the guest speakers were mega-church pastors who swapped stories about the latest gimmicks on getting more people in the pews.

7. Not all this was bad. God does do 'new things'; Jesus taught us you can't put new wine in old wineskins. But to reject the old ways just because they are old can be costly.

John Piper

"The Lord has made me wary of chronological snobbery. He showed me that newness is no virtue and oldness is no vice. Nothing is inferior for being old, and

nothing is valuable for being modern. This has freed me from the tyranny of novelty and opened me for the wisdom of the ages.”

B. The Tyranny of Novelty Versus The Wisdom of the Ages

1. The end result of being trapped in the ‘tyranny of novelty’ is that we stumble out of the ‘old paths’ that made us great in the first place. This was the genius behind Donald Trump’s campaign to ‘Make America Great Again!’.

a. Millions of Americans answered the call to, may I say it, ‘return to the old paths’!

b. We were sick of political leaders apologizing for America and bowing down to other nations; we were tired of being told about our past sins because deep down we knew our nation was founded by forefathers who believed in God!

c. These modern American ‘seeker friendly’ Pastors who afraid to preach politics or speak the Word of God to power need a history lesson!

2. America was founded in 1776, and within a few years she was already the envy of the free world.

3. In 1831, the nation of France sent a young French aristocrat to America to study our democracy, especially our prison systems.

a. This 26-year-old historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, toured the country and was amazed at the greatness he found here, writing about it in his famous book, “Democracy In America.”

Alexis de Tocqueville

“On my arrival in the United States, the first thing that struck my attention was the religious aspect of the country. The Americans combine the notions of religion and liberty so closely in their minds it is impossible to make them conceive of one without the other.”

4. This young Frenchman said he was seeking the secret of what made America great:

Alexis de Tocqueville

“I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers—and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless forests— and it was not there; in her democratic Congress and her matchless constitution—and it was not there...”

a. BUT THEN HE SAID THIS; (Are you ready my young Pastor friends?)

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America

“It was not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the genius and the greatness of America. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good she will cease to be great.”

5. Here we have a man who puts his finger on it. The secret of America’s genius and greatness lies in the power of its churches and in its pulpits that are ‘aflame with righteousness’!

6. There was a day when America’s pastors ran to the pulpits to preach on politics! **The famous “Black Robe Regiment”**, a name given to *Protestant Pastors who boldly spoke out against British oppression*. Here are some examples quoted in David Barton’s great book, “The Role of Christians and Pastors in Civil Government.

a. **Reverend Cyprian Strong**, in his sermon on July 4, 1799:

“If the government is not wisely administered, the fault must be within the people.”

b. Strong believed godly character guaranteed godly government:

Reverend Cyprian Strong, 1799

“As long as the people are well-informed and virtuous, so long they will be free and their government uncorrupted.”

c. The Black Robe pastors believed it was their duty to inform their parishioners on political matters:

Reverend James Strong

“The lack of correct information on political subjects exposes the people to great deception.”

These pastors expected Christian people to be informed and to VOTE wisely...

Reverend James Strong

“If the voters are without information, and give their votes at random, they will be manipulated by designing men and artful demagogues, and in doing so, forge their own chains.”

These pastors held Christians responsible for bad leaders...

Cyprian Strong

“It will be our own fault if we have not good men at the helm.”

7. These pastors pulled no punches; they preached like the prophets of old; men like **Reverend Henry Rowland**, who called the people to repentance in 1800: **“Let us beseech the Almighty for forgiveness of our national transgressions...and conform our personal lives to the revealed will of God.”**

Reverend Henry A. Rowland, 1800

a. I have a book of several hundred sermons preached in America’s first 30 years as a nation. There’s not a single ‘seeker-sensitive sermon’ to be found. Just pulpits filled by pastors pursuing the ‘old paths’! And it made America great.

8. But many times today it’s about ‘new paths’: lattes in the lobby, on stage light shows that look like Broadway, skinny jeans and smoke machines. Lots of style little substance. And look what’s happening in our country!

9. There was a day when God’s prophets held God’s pastors accountable for the political condition of the country.

Charles G. Finney

“If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it.”

10. Pastors are accountable! But what about those in the pews? Isn't it time for God's people to look for new leaders?

Pastor Chuck Baldwin

"It is time for Christians to acknowledge that these ministers are not pastors; they are CEOs. They are not Bible teachers; they are performers. They are not shepherds; they are hirelings."

Pastor Chuck Baldwin

"It is also time for Christians to be honest with themselves: do they want a pastor who desires to be faithful to the scriptures, or do they want a pastor who is simply trying to be 'successful'? Be honest with yourself, Christian friend."

11. It doesn't take a prophet to see how God is shaking America; but many miss the fact that He is also shaking the Church. As a matter of fact...

C. There Is A Great Divide Happening in the Church

1. America is more divided than any time since the Civil War; but how few sons of Issachar really understand the times and know that what's going on in the culture is a reflection of what's going on in the church?

2. The church is the 'head' not the 'tail'; when the church forgets the 'old paths' the nation follows suit. Judgment begins at the house of God.

1 Peter 4:17-18

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

3. When the church forgets who she is the nation forgets who they are! The real division today is not between the Republicans and the Democrats; it's in the church between those who will ask for the old paths and those who won't!

4. Some churches are splitting over this; others are melting down; some are disappearing. God is dividing the sheep from the goats in His own house!

a. Some churches do not honor the Holy Spirit.

A.W. Tozer

There are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for months.

b. Other churches are preaching something called a 'hyper-grace' message so they can keep sinners comfortable in the services.

A.W. Tozer

We cannot afford to let down our Christian standards just to hold the interest of people who want to go to hell and still belong to a church.

c. Many pews and pulpits today have what Bishop Ryle called a 'common Christianity'.

J.C. Ryle

There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity today that many have, and think they have enough—a cheap Christianity which offends nobody and requires no sacrifice—which costs nothing and is worth nothing.

d. A.W. Tozer sums it up:

A.W. Tozer

Christianity is decaying and going down into the gutter because the god of modern Christianity is not the God of the Bible.

5. Jesus prayed for unity! He even commanded us to be united. But the truth is that God Himself is behind the division in the Church. This has to happen before revival can come. The Apostle Paul explains why it has to happen:

1 Corinthians 11:18-19 NLT

First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized!

1 Corinthians 11:19 BBE

For divisions are necessary among you, in order that those who have God's approval may be clearly seen among you.

6. Make no mistake. God is exposing corruption in our political leaders. But He is also exposing those who refuse to 'ask for the old paths'. It's becoming very clear who's who!

a. Testimony: it's happening right now in our local area.

b. Fathers are being dishonored; young pastors are under a demonic delusion that their 'new paths' are better.

c. Splits are inevitable! But let not your heart be troubled! God is giving His people a chance to decide which way they will go. As in Jeremiah's day, some will refuse to return to the old paths. Back to our text:

Jeremiah 6:16 NLT

This is what the Lord says: "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, 'No, that's not the road we want!'

Jeremiah 6:17 NLT

I posted watchmen over you who said, 'Listen for the sound of the alarm.' But you replied, 'No! We won't pay attention!'

7. Thank God there are those of us who will pay attention!!!

III. Close: History Repeats Itself

A. God Has His Jeremiah's Today!

1. An old Puritan Bible scholar sums it up:

The Biblical Illustrator

Jeremiah called for reverence for the old things. He was the most unpopular of the prophets. First because he was somewhat of a pessimist, uttering predictions which the events proved true enough, but which were painted in too gloomy colors to suit the tastes of the people. Secondly, because he never flattered.

The Biblical Illustrator

And a third, and even greater, reason for the dislike, was that they regarded him as old-fashioned, out of date, an antiquated, obsolete old fogey, with his eyes behind. He was always harping on the old times when people lived simple lives and feared God. And the people sneered at him as a sort of fossil, as a man who had been born a century too late.

2. God has millions of faithful believers sitting on the sideline feeling out-of-touch with modern American Christianity. A lot of them are 'old-timers'. They hate what's happening in our country and have no idea what to do about it.

3. But hear this. God is in control. He is bringing us to a spiritual crossroad and telling us to Stop! Look around! And 'ask for the old paths'!

4. No one has a better handle on what's happening today than Dutch Sheets. I'll close with these words from him...

Dutch Sheets

America now needs a new generation of pathfinders and way-makers to arise and lead us back to our roots. Ironically, the way *forward* is sometimes *behind* us. Contrary to what many people believe, 'old' does not mean 'outdated'. The future must always be built on yesterday's strong foundation.

5. Our foundation is firm as a church. Our foundation is firm as a nation. It's time to get back to both!

Title