

IS THE RESTORATION PLEA STILL VALID?

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The faith and works of the 39th street congregation are known and appreciated by brethren everywhere, and I am grateful for the invitation to speak on this much anticipated program. I am likewise thankful for the opportunity to speak on the subject of the restoration of the New Testament church. It is a theme that ought to provoke passion among every member of the body of Christ.

The idea of a restoration necessarily implies a need to return to the original. That means, at the very least, the following:

1. There is an original.
2. The original was lost.
3. The original can be restored.

These three points will serve as an outline for this lesson.

There Is an Original

The original church. The original church Jesus built is a divine institution that one could (and many do) reject, **but never duplicate!** Here is why. First, Jesus said He would build it (Matthew 16:18). Second, the purchase price was the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Third, over and over again Jesus emphasized the singularity of the church:

1. "My church" (Matthew 16:18).
2. "The church is "His body" (Ephesians 1:22-23).
3. There is "one body" (Ephesians 4:4).
4. Reconciliation unto God is in "one body" (Ephesians 2:12-16).
5. There are many members yet but "one body" (1 Corinthians 12:20).
6. Jesus is the sole head of "the body" (Colossians 1:18).
7. Jesus is the Saviour of "the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

The original doctrine. God speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:2), little wonder then that Jesus said His words would judge us in the last Day (John 12:48). That message was given to the apostles who were inspired both in what they preached and what they wrote (John 16:13; 14:26). The original message would save a soul (James 1:21), the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

Those who carried the original message told lost souls the things which would be required to obtain eternal salvation. They had to hear the glorious gospel of Christ (Romans 10:17), they had to believe the gospel (Mark 16:15-16), repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), confess Christ before men (Romans 10:10), be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).

The book of Acts records those who yielded to the preaching of the gospel and those who refused; therefore, it is a book of conversions and non-conversions. Those who yielded had no doubt as to what they were being added (Acts 2:47), for only the original church existed.

The original teaching. The original teaching offered a genuine hope of everlasting life--*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life."* (John 10:27-28). Peter as well as the other apostles were so discouraged when Jesus allowed himself to be put to death and it was voluntary (John 10:18), but after seeing the resurrected Christ, Peter would write for every Christian as long as time remains; *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:3-4).

The original teaching gave us all the truth (John 16:13) that could furnish us unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17), all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Now this, a part of that truth stated that there would be a departure from the faith. No shock, no surprise, no disbelief--there would be a falling away.

"Now the Spirit seeketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; But after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that the day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:2-4).

Some say this is a reference to the Pope and the Catholic church. You certainly can see how it could be, especially in light of the fact that the falling away would lead to a hierarchy that would claim to speak for God and be infallible in their teaching! The original would be cast aside.

Jesus knew that men would not be satisfied with the original. They would depart from that which Christ built and shed His blood for to form their own human institutions. Oh to be sure, they would not acknowledge that as their goal, for they would simply do it, and call what they started the church as though there is no difference between that which is of human origin and that which is of Divine origin. Folks, listen! Any institution started by men is an imitation, a counterfeit, because no man can duplicate the original built by Christ and purchased by His blood.

Now this question, how did it happen? It happened slowly. Apostasy does not generally happen over night, it is a gradual departure. It happened among those whose responsibility it was to protect the flock. It happened as foretold ; *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”* (Acts 20:28-30).

The Rise of a Hierarchy That in Each Step Elevated Itself Above Other Men

1. One elder rose to become the head elder, or bishop (the words elder and bishop are not used in the Bible for different offices), and exercised authority over several congregations.
2. A priesthood developed to perform for others what they could not do for themselves (The Bible makes it clear that every Christian is a priest I Peter 2:5; 9).
3. Archbishops were introduced to have authority over the bishops (Archbishops are a complete stranger to the Bible).
4. Cardinals are over archbishops, and they select the Pope (unheard of in the scriptures).
5. The Pope claims to be the head of the church, and he appoints the cardinals. Beloved, the Pope may be the head of something, but it is not the church of the New Testament. Christ is the head over His church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18).

What have we seen? An ecclesiasticism (organization or government) unknown in the scriptures. The desire for power lying at the root. To avoid any questions concerning this system of power, the Bible was removed from every home. The Bible would be interpreted by the hierarchy, they would tell the people what to think. Justification? The common man is incapable of understanding the word of God--we need to interpret it for you.

What a stark contrast to what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus; ***“How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ”*** (Ephesians 3:3-4). Get what Paul is saying. God revealed it, I wrote it, and when you read it you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ! Can the average person understand the Bible? Yes!!! Will it take effort (II Timothy 2:15)? Yes!!!!

The original church abandoned, a substitute set up in its place, the Bible controlled by those in power, we enter the period of the dark ages for over a thousand years. In opposition to it, men like Luther, Calvin, and Wesley attempted to reform the religion of their day, each starting their own substitute in the process.

Luther taught the doctrine of “faith only”. And when the book of James refuted his teaching, he rejected the book as inspired, for James wrote by inspiration, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). In fact, so intent on disproving the Catholic church and its system of works, Luther, in his translation of the Bible, added a word to Romans 3:28: ***“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith (only) without the deeds of the Law”***. In so doing Luther violated the two things that were forbidden by God in Revelation 22:18-19. He added and took away from the word of God.

Calvin taught the doctrine of predestination, and to support his doctrine he developed five core teachings:

1. Total depravity - every child born is corrupted with sin.
2. Unconditional election - if one is predestined to go to heaven, no act either good or bad will altar that destination.
3. Limited atonement - the limited number is set and will not be enlarged upon.
4. Irresistible grace - when one is called by God they will be helpless to resist.
5. Preservation of the saints - once saved always saved.

Calvin was not wrong on one point, he was wrong on every point!

1. Sin is not inherited (Ezekiel 18:20; Psalms 139:14; Matthew 18:3).
2. People were told they had to obey (Hebrews 5:9; Acts 6:6; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).
3. One verse, every creature was to hear the gospel and have an opportunity to obey (Mark 16:15-16).
4. The Bible makes it clear that we do have a will and a choice (Leviticus 1:3; Joshua 24:15).
5. If the Bible means anything at all, the saved can fall away and be lost (Philippians 2:12; I Corinthians 10:12; I Tim 4:1-2; II Peter 2:20-22; Revelation 3:1-5).

Wesley tried to bring emotion into what he perceived to be a cold and formal religion. A common sentiment among those who follow the teaching of Wesley is expressed in the following statement: "Methodists think with their hearts, not with their minds". A mind is a terrible thing to waste. I am not suggesting that the heart is not vital, but a heartfelt religion without truth is not really a religion at all (Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 10:2-3).

The reverse of that is true as well--a religion of the mind, without the heart is little better. The church at Ephesus was addressed by Jesus in Revelation 2:1-5, and here is what was said of that congregation. They stood for truth, they were zealous workers, they tried those who claimed to be apostles and found them to be liars, but somewhere along the line they lost their love for the Lord they claimed to serve. We must never be guilty of that!

What can we do? Only one thing. Tell people to go back to the original! Having seen the folly of human denominations, many of us have already made that journey, desiring to be no more or no less than New Testament Christians, determined to believe, preach and practice those things revealed in the gospel of Christ.

Is the restoration plea still valid? Absolutely! Jesus built **His church**, and that church could never be duplicated, but it can be entered into if the seed of the kingdom is planted in good and honest hearts (Luke 8:11-15). Let's go back to the first century church. Be nothing, want nothing, accept nothing that cannot be found on the pages of the new Testament and be Christians only, trusting Him for the fulfillment of every promise. May God bless us to that end!