

RESTORATION OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

Most members of the church of Christ are familiar with this subject. They may not understand all that is involved, but at least they have heard preachers say that we are endeavoring to restore the church of the New Testament. The church revealed to us in the New Testament is the church Jesus built (Matt. 16:18). This church was directed by His inspired apostles and constitutes the divine pattern by which we are to build today. The great need of the religious world is a complete restoration of the rule of faith (Phil. 3:16) and practice; complete restoration of the organization, worship and mission of the church; and a complete restoration of the conditions of salvation which were characteristic of the church revealed in the New Testament scriptures.

Someone may say, "What is restoration?" To restore is to "return"; "to re-establish"; "to put back into existence or use". Isaac restored the wells his father Abraham had dug in Gerar (Gen. 26: 17 - 18). He put these wells back into use -- restored them just as they were in the beginning. This is what we must do with the Lord's church -- we must restore it as it was in the beginning.

The Lord's church is made up of two elements -- People and Truth. In the absence of people the church can have only a potential existence. The characteristics of the church are inherent in the seed -- the word of God (Luke 8:11; I Pet. 1:23). This seed, the truth, awaits application in the lives of people. God does not force people to obey Him. We become His people by our own choice of making application of the truth in our lives (Matt. 11:28 - 30; 23:27). God desires our loyalty and has done everything necessary to make our salvation possible, but He has not forced anyone to come to Him. Each individual must will to come to God (John 7:17; Rev. 22:17). After we make the choice to be a child of God he does not force us to remain faithful, but we must choose to continue in His will. God's people may, and many do, deny the Lord who bought them (II Pet. 2: 1 - 2) and depart from the faith (I Tim. 4:1).

God and Christ change not (James 1:17), their word abides forever (I Pet. 1:25; II Tim. 2:13), thus the divine element of the church is fixed and constant. We have seen, however, that the human element of the church is not so stable. Therefore, we must not measure the church by the rule of human action (II Cor. 10:12) because here is a truth we must never forget: God's people can and do change, and He does not force them to remain faithful!

Many times God's people in a given community begin to make changes from the word of God, changes that are made over a long period of time. The changes begin with concepts and practices that are wrong in principle, but not easily discerned. After a while the "power of tradition" (Matt. 15:2) asserts itself and God's people at that place will justify further wrongs on the basis of things they have done in the past (II Tim. 4:4). These people who have been faithful people of God have now turned from the word of God and changed, but they are still regarded by most people in the community as the "church" and their practices are considered as practices of the "church of Christ". After the change comes about, the general attitude is that all who would differ are heretics and have left the church and the faith completely, but this attitude shows a misunderstanding of restoration. When we stop to consider the human side of the church it is then obvious that restoration is not something that is accomplished once and for all, but is a thing that must be continuous in every generation! Restoration restores nothing that cannot be lost

again! This being so, we must never forget that we are the Lord's church only if we walk according to God's divine truth (I John 2:19; I Cor. 11:19). We must constantly check our principles and practices against the unchanging standard, the word of God. This demands objective, prejudice-free study (II Tim. 2:15).

There can be no restoration without the spirit of restoration which is the desire to take the New Testament as the standard of obedience. One cannot have the spirit of restoration without completely laying aside all human creeds, decrees of popes, and religious organizations unknown to the New Testament. Here are some vital facts that we must know and believe about the New Testament if we are to be successful in restoring New Testament Christianity: (1) The New Testament is divine -- from God (II Tim. 3: 16 -17); (2) It is authoritative (John 12:48); (3) It is intelligible (Eph. 3:4; 5:17); (4) It is universal (Mark 16: 15 -16); (5) It needs no revision (James 1:25; I Cor. 13:10); (6) It is sufficient (II Tim. 3: 16 -17); and (7) It has life and power to bring the church into existence any time men choose to let it have its way in their lives (Luke 8:11; Heb. 4:12).

So I say to you, brother or sister in Christ, are you interested in restoring New Testament Christianity, or do you find yourself blindly following the popular crowd without seriously checking to see whether or not your practice is after the New Testament order? Remember, we are the Lord's church ONLY if we walk according to God's divine truth (I John 2:19; I Cor. 11:19)!

(I am indebted to Robert Turner for some thoughts from his article entitled "When Does the Church Change?")

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