

## DID THE RESTORATION FAIL?

From the very beginning of the church of my Lord has been a unique institution in that it was founded on the Christ himself, and spread by the preaching of his death, burial and resurrection. After Peter confessed, *"thou art the Christ, the son of the living God,"* Jesus declared, *"upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:16-18)

This truth was never questioned by inspired men, and Paul wrote, *"and other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* (1 corinthians 3:11). Those who were inducted into Christ constituted this divine organization, of whom Paul wrote, *"now therefore ye. . . are the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple of the Lord."* (Ephesians 2:19-21)

God wanted his church to be apart from the world and every form of corrupt worship that could ever be devised by man. *In 2 Corinthians 6:15-18 (15) And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? (16) And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, (18) And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

It is no different today. God still demands that His church be unique!

Back in the history of the people of God, as the children of Israel sought a king to be like the nations around them, the lure of popular acceptance has brought about an amalgamation of the church with false religions among us. All too often the people of God are ready to conform to the religious practices that are all about us. Through the years we have received letters and inquiries concerning the observance of Easter, Halloween, Christmas, and other such attachments to pagan and idolatrous practices of the day. It is not enough to explain that God's word, which "furnished completely unto every good work. 2 Timothy 3:17, is as silent as the grave on the subject of the pagan origins! We must remember that God's people are peculiar in their separation from such things. It is by maintaining this line of demarcation that they retain the right to exist. People who are converted to Christ must be taught, and early, in these matters and taught to uphold the differences. There are differences, but one of the reasons today we do not see them as clearly, is that the members of the church have failed to make those distinctions known.

## WHY THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT GREW.

Let it be understood that I am a member of the fellowship of Christ. I am not a member of the restoration fellowship, as it is being called. I am not a member of a movement, except the movement that is the body

of Christ. I do not refer to the church as the restoration and I do not refer to the church as a movement within that restoration. Restoration is an idea, not a movement.

The plea for religious restoration caught the attention, fanned the interest, and captured the enthusiasm of the religious world. Many were fed up with the formalism, the coldness and error of the denominations of which they were members. The restoration plea was a distinctive one and it had a reasonable declaration. It was different from the messages being preached in the pulpits of the day. In the middle of confusion, conflicts and warring factions, these preachers brought forthright, simple and plain gospel truths and they challenged all who would hear to accept the inspired truth of the word of God.

They declared, in accordance with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that every scripture was inspired by God, and that every departure from that word was wrong, and a departure from God's truth, and every acceptance of truth was right; and that unity and harmony could be had by all, if all would forsake creeds and party names, and be united in Christ by accepting His gospel. They met bitter opposition, but they also met ready acceptance on the part of many honest, sincere people! It was from this idea the pledge came: "We speak where the Bible speaks — We are silent where the Bible is silent!" Of course, this is just a shortened version of 1 Peter 4:11 where the apostle says, *"if any man speaketh, {speaking} as it were oracles of God,"*

## ENERGETIC PREACHERS

Enthusiastic about their newly gained knowledge and acceptance, preachers stood in defiance of the traditions of men, and took their stand on God's word, while debating the highest echelon of sectarian scholarship. Audiences were awed by scholarship, but won by the presentation of God's simple formula for the salvation of souls. Young converts and even the world was made to recognize the difference between truth and error! There was such a thing as error in worship and service to God. In the midst of ridicule, slander and sneers, the cause of Christ was growing in strength daily. Every member was reciting the slogan: *"We call Bible things by Bible names. We do Bible things in Bible ways."* They contended: If the practice was scriptural, then there ought to be a scriptural terminology to describe it! Does that sound odd today in the midst of all we live in? They deplored the unscriptural language as the language of Ashdod. They quoted: 1 Corinthians 2:13 *"Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual {words}."* How we long for those preachers of yesteryear, and how we long for that kind of preaching.

## NO COMPROMISE OF TRUTH

Any compromise on their part in those early days would have spelled defeat! The surrender of any one principle would have equated them with the sects, and fortified their right to exist! Knowing this, they adamantly refused to surrender a single point. It is still my contention today, that if the church is not

different from the denominations and sects of the world, then what right does it have to exist? The preachers and members of years gone by cried, *"we must go all the way back to Jerusalem, camp at the feet of the apostles and prophets, and accept only inspired truth! We will rally around Christ, who died for us, and accept His authority alone."* This plea set them against every other religious group of the day, yet they realized the need; and it provided them a rallying point for all Bible-loving men and Bible students who saw the tragedy of a divided Christendom. While incurring the wrath of religious bigots, it won the respect and approval of the discerning people who truly sought salvation.

## THE MOVEMENT GREW

Out of the cotton patches and corn fields; late on Saturday afternoons came the rustic farmers who were to "grace the pulpits" the next Sunday morning. Walking for many; riding a horse or mule for others, and occasionally some driving a buggy, they met their appointments at some schoolhouse, brush arbor, living room or "neath a shady oak" to tell folks how to be save from their sins! They didn't have to dress up in fine clothes and they didn't dress up their message to preach it! Because of the fearless proclamation of God's word, the loyal allegiance to its truths, and their dauntless efforts to save souls, the church of the lord grew in numerical as well as spiritual strength! Their campaign moved from the brush arbors to small meeting houses "on the wrong side of the tracks," and on to the commodious buildings in the better sections of town. As time went on, preachers stepped into pulpits better educated and better prepared; but they had not forsaken the original plea! There was still the challenge of Jeremiah: Jeremiah 23:28 *"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully...saith Jehovah."*

A false message was always met with a challenge, with Bible in hand, the spirit of Christ in heart, and a determination to do the will of God, regardless of the consequences. There was a test for all who dared to advance a new doctrine. Isaiah 8:20 *"To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them."*

It wasn't long before the sectarian world knew where they met, where they stood, and also what they stood for! These stalwart preachers knew the tragedy of sin, and the terror of a burning hell that awaited all who failed to obey the gospel. They had a "call" to preach, a call based on their knowledge of the word of God, that compelled them to say with Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 20:9 *"And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot {contain}."*

If their discourse was not scholarly, it was still recognized as scriptural. They had no artistic baptistry, yet they drew a graphic picture as they led the penitent believers into the rivers, creeks and ponds to bury them in baptism. They didn't get big salaries - but they did get results! We dare not belittle their achievements as we look at the large, influential churches of our day that were begotten by their labors.

Our pioneering preachers laid the cornerstone for our growth and development, and our present ostentatious buildings and programs sprouted from their having restored the original order of things.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

After the plea for restoration created this wonderful development, something went wrong. Division rose within the ranks, splintering the hopes and dreams of a restored church of Christ, just like it was in the Bible. Still today there are many who say it was over "instrumental music." But there was more to it than that. It was not the only cause. That was only the outward manifestation of a cancerous malady! The real division was about AUTHORITY. There was an element in the church that desired to be like the religious sects about them, and saw no harm in adding to their worship what had not been specifically forbidden by the scriptures.

On the other hand there were those who still contended, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent!" With contempt, those who desired to stay with the Bible were called "non-progressive" by the "progressives." When they retreated from the sacred principle of following the Bible and having Bible authority, for what they did, they gave up their right to exist, therefore they became a harbor for derelict souls who found in them a place for compromise, for husbands and wives who were divided religiously, with no real conviction to bind them and no zeal for the gospel.

Having won this battle, the church of God also found "ease in Zion", and ceased to "fight the good fight of faith." As a youth, it was not uncommon to have debates (or heated discussions) on the school ground. People talked about the Bible teachings in the home when visitors came. It was an open topic of conversation where members of the church were present. As a result even boys and girls felt the need to know how to "*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" Jude 3. Things have changed: Now people are afraid to mention the Bible to visitors in the home, afraid of being offensive. They used to say, "If you want to know what the Bible says, just as a member of the church of Christ. They don't accuse of having that kind of knowledge anymore. The Psalmist said, "*Speak of thy salvation,*" but we act like we are smitten with the demon of dumbness, and salvation is a subject that is taboo! Now, do you still wonder why the Lord's church is not growing?

The only thing that has changed is people. And they really haven't changed that much. Human nature pretty much remains the same. But there is no passion for truth anymore. We have been sold the bill of goods of secular humanism and many of my own brethren believe each person has the right to decide for himself what is right and wrong, and the Bible has little to do with it. If a person is religious we fear to approach him because we are afraid we don't know any more about the Bible than they do, and sadly that is true in so many cases.

But there must be a purpose for us here. That purpose entails doing what we can to save sinners from

being lost. Our stand for Christian unity must be stated emphatically and often. We must constantly assert that the only feasible basis for unity is the complete return to the word of God, and total submission to His authority. Unity meetings are not going to accomplish this. When someone wants to have dialogue, I want him to answer one question: "Do you accept the authority of Christ and the scriptures absolutely?" If he can't answer that directly, without hedging and going over it several times, we have nothing to discuss, nothing to have dialogue about. We are not interested in union with any religious body. The only unity we are interested in scriptural unity. This can't exist until people drop all unscriptural names, creeds, dogmas and doctrines and renounce all innovations and departures from the word of God.

If the religious world wants peace and harmony, let them know they can have it, not on our ground, but on the Bible grounds. In the meantime, we must not be governed by the plain directives found in 2 John 9-11, (9) *"Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. (10) If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into {your} house, and give him no greeting: (11) for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works."* And Galatians 2:18 *"For if I build up again those things which I destroyed, I prove myself a transgressor."*

We cannot draw near to God by forsaking his teaching on unity.