

The Restoration Movement

Roadblocks To Restoration

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Jeremiah wrote, "Thus says the LORD, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it'" (Jeremiah 6:16).

The search for the "ancient paths" can be likened to a trip down a road. At the end of the road is the object we seek: the church we read about in the Bible. However, to get to our destination, we must overcome some roadblocks, some obstacles. What are they?

APATHY

One type of obstacle to the realization of the restoration ideal is lack of concern. Some people believe that it does not matter to God what we believe or practice in religion. Thinking that God does not care, they do not care either. They are indifferent to the restoration plea. Others like the idea of restoration but are too lazy to expend the effort required to learn what restoration would mean to them or to act upon what they learn.

Those who are indifferent or lazy will never restore Christ's church. The restoration plea requires people to be concerned about doing God's will, to work toward discovering that will, and to obey it.

PREJUDICE

A second roadblock on the road to restoration is prejudice, or preconceived ideas. When we are deeply committed to a particular religious system, it is difficult to give up our religious traditions. This is true even when we learn that our practices were obviously not a part of the New

Testament pattern. An example of the struggle people have in overcoming their prejudices is found in restoration history. In the early 1800s, Thomas Campbell, a leader in the Restoration Movement in the US, spoke to a group of friends in a private home near Washington, Pennsylvania. He concluded his lesson with the famous motto "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Earl West described the reaction to his words:

When Campbell spoke these words, and paused, there was a solemn hush that fell across the assembly that showed the intensity of the emotions of the hour. Campbell sat down. A Scottish bookseller, Andrew Munro, a rather sentimental person, was the first to break the silence. "Mr. Campbell," he said, "if we adopt that as a basis, then there is an end to infant baptism." Campbell replied: "Of course, if infant baptism be not found in the scriptures, we can have nothing to do with it." Thomas Acheson then arose and cried: "I hope I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of the Scripture, 'Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" Saying that, he burst into tears. James Foster, who even in Ireland had been opposed to infant baptism, arose and cried out: "Mr. Acheson, I would remark that in the portion of Scripture you have quoted, there is no reference whatever to infant baptism."¹

In a similar way, people today may have such a strong emotional attachment to some denomination or some unscriptural religious practice

¹Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, vol. 1, *A History of the Restoration Movement 1800-1865* (German-town, Tenn.: Religious Book Service, 1990), 47-48.

that they find it almost impossible to change.

If we want to be sure of pleasing God, we must have “honest and good heart[s]” (Luke 8:15) that can overcome personal biases. Only by putting away our prejudices and reading and applying the Bible honestly can we hope to restore the New Testament church.

WRONG WAYS OF THINKING

A third obstacle to restoring the church of the first century is wrong views of the Scriptures. The philosophies that guide many people in today’s world lead them to reject the idea of restoring the New Testament church.

Modern “Scientific” Thinking:

The Rejection of Verbal Inspiration

If we are to restore Christ’s church, we must refute any view which questions the divine origin of the Scriptures. Modern “scientific” thinking has led many to question the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Those who doubt that the Bible is inspired—who believe that the individual books were not written by the men whose names they bear, and who believe that the Bible contradicts itself and is full of factual errors—are not likely to accept the plea to restore New Testament Christianity. To them, such an approach to the Bible seems naive, old-fashioned, and simplistic. They may claim to see some spiritual value in following Jesus, but the idea of trying to reproduce the New Testament church repels them.

What can we say to those with such an attitude? Our views of the Scriptures seem irreconcilable. We can point out to these critics, however, that (1) some good, honest, highly educated scholars believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, just as we do, and that (2) Jesus, the apostles, and the early church viewed the Scriptures as verbally inspired. Followers of Jesus should share the respect for the Scriptures that He, His apostles, and the first-century church held.

Postmodernism:

The Rejection of Absolutes

Another kind of thinking that stands in the way of restoring the New Testament church is postmodernism. According to many today, the only thing that is “wrong” is to say that something is wrong! We live in a world which denies absolutes in these matters! People who accept such a view reject the restoration plea because it teaches that there is a right way to worship and serve God. The idea that there is a right way implies a wrong way—and, to the postmodernist, that is narrow-minded and judgmental!

Such thinking is illogical. Just as absolutes exist in math and science, there are absolutes in the spiritual realm. Society presupposes and requires some absolutes. God expects us to serve Him according to His plan and to judge what is right or wrong.

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