

Imagine finding the remains of a 1925 Model T Ford pickup and deciding to completely restore it, i.e. to return it to its original condition. You would have to know exactly what it was like when it was new and faithfully follow that pattern without addition or subtraction.

Over 200 years ago some people realized that the church of the 19th century was very different from the church of the first century. Instead of unity there was widespread division. Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians 4:17. They started what is now known as the Restoration Movement in an attempt to return the church to its original condition because the changes were prohibited, predicted, and counterproductive. Jude 3; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; John 17:20-23.

Initially, the Restoration Movement spread like wildfire. Having started in 1809 with Thomas Campbell's "Declaration And Address," it became the country's fourth largest religious movement by 1850 and its fastest growing over the next decade. Jeremiah 6:16 was its text; the NT was its pattern (2 Timothy 3:16-17); and its slogans were: "Where the scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." "No book but the Bible, no creed but Christ; no name but the divine name." "In faith, unity; in opinions, liberty; and in all things, charity."

Sadly its spread was soon arrested by internal strife. The debated issues were missionary societies and instrumental music. The real question, however, was whether or not restoration churches were going to remain restoration churches.

There is a predictable pattern of apostasy. Isaiah 35:8-10; Jeremiah 18:15; Judges 2:17B; Jeremiah 6:16. Some just take a few steps in the wrong direction. Others use the same logic and take more and more steps. These eventually realize they are no longer on Restoration Road but do not care because by then they want to be back on Denominational drive.

Apply to restoring 1925 Model T Ford pickups, to restoration churches in the 1800's, and to churches of Christ in the 1900's. At the time Richard T. Hughes wrote the following about the latter he was a Distinguished Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. In other words, he was by no means biased in favor of the "non-institutional" point of view. "Those who sought to move Churches of Christ toward greater institutionalization consistently did so in the name of primitive Christianity and with regular appeals to the NT pattern. Typically, they manifested no awareness at all of the ever-widening gap that separated progressive, mainstream Churches of Christ in the mid-twentieth century from their nineteenth-century foundations ... those who opposed the development of institutions stood squarely in the ... mainstream of their nineteenth-century heritage, contrary to the assertions of mainstream Churches of Christ that they were deviants, radicals, and schismatics." In truth, non-institutionalism was not a heresy "at all when measured by the standards of the nineteenth century ... Their allegiance to the ideals of the nineteenth century became heretical only in the context of the modernizing tendencies of the twentieth-century Churches of Christ ... By the late 1970s, especially in large congregations in urban centers, one could listen to preachers in Churches of Christ for weeks and months on end and never hear anything remotely approaching the traditional ... message that had defined the tradition for a century and a half." "Certain doctrines long held among churches of Christ are being called into question by various individuals today. Among these are views regarding evolution; marriage, divorce and remarriage; women's role in the church; the exclusive nature of the church; the place of baptism in salvation; instrumental music in worship; methods of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics); and the relationship of church to society ... The end result, if left unchecked, will be a far different body than that which we now know ... We are not inventing anything new here. Decades ago the Disciples of Christ faced many of these issues and opted to take a liberal view on them. The result was a loss of identity as a Restoration body and subsequent loss of growth and direction ... Do we want the same thing? Some apparently do" (Glover Shipp, 1991).

## **APPLICATIONS:**

### **1. Restoration is needed as much today as ever.**

A. We cannot improve on God's way of doing anything and must never try. Prov 3:5-8; 14:12; 2 Tim 3:16-17. "I think it is an undeniable truth, that men never departed from primitive Christianity until they lost faith in it. And no Christian ever yet adopted human systems and appliances until his faith becomes weak in the divine ... I repeat, therefore, that what we need is not a new plan of missionary work, but more faith in the old Jerusalem plan ... We want more faith and less machinery, more work and less talk, more faith and less planning. The Lord has given us the plan, and bids us go work in his vineyard; but instead of going to work with the tools He has furnished, we spend all day in making new ones which in our wisdom, we think will work better. Let us quit it, and go to work with a hearty good will ... In a word, let original Christianity be restored in faith and practice, and nothing else will be needed" (Walsh, 1867). "I have no confidence in human wisdom, common sense, sanctified or unsanctified, improving upon the model of organization, worship or work given by the Holy Spirit. And if we cut loose from these, there can be no restraint to the fancies and follies of humanity. The departures may not be very marked or flagrant at first, but once under headway they will grow with accelerating force" (Lipscomb, 1890).

B. The forces of evil that worked so hard and effectively to get God's people off Holiness Highway in the 100s and Restoration Road in the 1800s and 1900s are still at work in the 2000s.

C. We must learn from the mistakes of the past, otherwise we are doomed to repeat them.

D. We need to learn about restoration, believe in the need for it, plea for everyone to buy into it, work at doing it, and fight against corruptions of it.

E. Restoration is the only authorized and plausible path to the scriptural peace, growth, and unity everyone so desperately needs the church to enjoy. "To save the world, Christ requires his people to be one through the truth, as he and his Father are one. The world in unbelief, in sin, going down to hell, calls strongly, tenderly to the children of God, to be one, that the world may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that it may be saved. The children of God can never be one by introducing human opinions, practices based on human judgment, institutions, organizations, and ways and works based on the commandments of men. They all bring division and gender strife. There is but one pathway to union among God's people, but one rule that can make us one in Christ Jesus, that can bring salvation to the world. That is, let each one lay aside all opinions, ways, inventions, devices, practices, organizations and creeds, confessions and formularies of faith, names and manner of work, save those plainly presented and clearly required in the NT. Let all determine to do nothing in religion, save that plainly taught in the Scriptures of truth, let no one ask his brother to accept anything that God has not required, but to faithfully do just what he has required, and let all do this in the way approved by God. This will reduce all religious worship and service to its original Divine simplicity and purity, and will restore to it, its original efficacy and power to save. In this simplicity and purity, and perfect harmony with the will of God, it will secure the richest blessing, and the constant presence and help of God. God will dwell with us, and work through us, we will be blessed, our fellowmen be saved and God be glorified. Who would not gladly lay aside every opinion and preference, and work and way of human wisdom, and every practice based on opinion, to bring about an end so desirable, so fruitful in good men and honor to God?" (Lipscomb, 1891).

## 2. **Unity is possible but not easily achieved.** Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16.

A. Unity demands two things.

1) We must have book, chapter, and verse for everything we do. Col 3:17A. The question is never where does the Bible say we can't, but always where does the Bible say we can. Deuteronomy 29:29. "The concealment's of the Bible are as Divine as its revelations. Infinite wisdom was required as much to determine of what man should be ignorant as what man should know. Indeed, since, in regard to all matters connected with the unseen spiritual world, man is entirely dependent upon Divine revelation, the limits of that revelation must necessarily mark out also the domain of human ignorance, as the shores of a continent become the boundaries of a trackless and unfathomed ocean. Hence it is, that the silence of the Bible is to be revered equally with its teachings and that to intrude into things not seen and not revealed evinces the vanity of a fleshly mind as much as to misinterpret and pervert the express statements of the Scriptures" (Richardson).

2) We must forsake liberties for peace, growth, and unity when we think something is an authorized option but others sincerely disagree. Since maturity levels differ, someone must yield or endless division is inevitable. Rom 14-15, 1 Cor 8-10. The things everyone agrees we must be doing, the things over which we rarely divide, are enough to keep us busy and growing. The things people think are more important than peace and unity never realize their promise. With division we always lose more than we gain.

B. The battle for restoration must be fought at the first suggestion of departure. This is where the principle of restoration is embraced or abandoned and where unity and peace are most easily won or lost. It is far easier to maintain unity than to restore it and if we do not care enough to keep it we are unlikely to restore it if we lose it. Once division occurs, it is usually permanent. Reconciliation is extremely rare.

## 3. **Abuses in the name of restoration do not invalidate its need or justify its rejection.**

A. Yes, some "restorationists" make traditions of men into laws of God, wrongly condemn authorized changes in matters of judgment, focus only or primarily on exterior matters (Matthew 23:23-24), plea for restoration in an unloving manner, are arrogantly certain they have nothing more to restore, etc.

B. Yes, it is wrong for any generation to think they cannot be wrong. Illustration: Brewer, Keeble, Wallace, Hardeman.

C. However, it is equally foolish for the younger generation to overreact and think that the older generation has gotten everything wrong, that since they could be wrong about something they cannot say anyone is wrong about anything, etc.

D. "The belief that local churches can be and should be uniform in organization, worship and work in every age, sometimes referred to as 'restorationism' or 'primitivism,' has been challenged throughout Christian history and has been seriously questioned in recent years by many people inside the ... restoration movement. Inevitably, and properly, many second and third generation Christians who have grown up in churches of Christ feel that they must ponder the basis of their personal religious commitment rather than accept the traditional practices handed down to them. Unfortunately, their speculations often carelessly confuse the inadequacies and inconsistencies they have observed in the personal and institutional behavior of past generations with the grand and ancient ideal of living as primitive NT Christians. The stylish mantra of late urges the next generation to 'think outside the box.' I am convinced that a large percentage of the people who voice such challenges have very little understanding of what is 'inside the box.' The box of NT primitivism contains far more than seemingly legalistic arguments about instrumental music and sponsoring churches – though those discussions are necessarily a part of the agenda of anyone seriously committed to following biblical patterns. But the idea of restoring NT churches, of modeling ourselves on primitive Christians, is a profoundly biblical, richly textured concept with deep historical roots. After fifty years of studying and writing religious history, I have looked inside many 'boxes.' Along with generations of serious Bible-believing Christians before me, I have found no better gyroscope for life than to seek to find and follow the 'ancient order of things'" (Harrell).