

The BEACON



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Restoration of New Testament Christianity

There is a period of church history called the reformation movement in which prominent men such as John Wyclif, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley and others sought to reform certain evils within the religious bodies or institutions in which they were affiliated. As they tried to reform certain religious evils within their own groups, they were in most cases disfellowshipped, so they started religious bodies or institutions of their own.

This naturally produced more and more religious bodies. From this resulted the various denominations of religion we have today. Understand this, that these men at first sought only to reform their own religious bodies, and only after they were disfellowshipped did they start a church of their own. This movement began about 1517 and is still going on to some degree today.

About 1793 another movement had gotten under way called the restoration movement. Prominent men in the movement were James O'Kelly, Abner Jones, Barton Stone, Walter Scott, John Smith, Alexander Campbell, and others. These men did not believe that it was enough just to reform old religious institutions that had become corrupted. They believed that the only way to church unity, true worship, and complete fellowship with God was to restore the church as it was in the beginning. They did not desire to start any new religious bodies, for through a study of the scriptures they believed that Christ established only one church in the beginning. (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4.) These people refused to be called by any name except "Christian" as found in the New Testament. They concluded that since Christ paid for the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22,23), followers of Christ should wear only His name, and they refused to be called Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, or other names which denote division. In the New Testament the church of Christ is referred to as "church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23), "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), and other names denoting ownership by Christ. There is no authority to call the church by any other name than those names given in the New Testament.

These men refused to be governed by any rule book except the New Testament, because the law of Christ as revealed in the New Testament is complete and needs no revision. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) They therefore rejected all manuals, creeds, and disciplines produced by men who thought they could improve upon the New Testament. Although these creed books were written to promote unity, they are the cause of much division and strife, and they place a stumbling block in front of people who wish to be guided only by the New Testament.

Their worship was simple and warm as practiced by the early Christians and recorded in the New Testament. Their worship was from the heart guided by New Testament truths. They had no liturgy or ritual to follow in prayer, but it came from the heart. Their singing was also from the heart and they did not use mechanical music, which is unauthorized in the New Testament. (Col. 3:16.) "The simplicity of the government and worship of the New Testament was not originated by Thomas Campbell, Barton Stone,

Walter Scott, Alexander Campbell, Rice Haggard, or John Smith. They were revealed in God's word and were the teaching and practice of the church throughout the apostolic age."¹

These men did not call each other by religious titles such as "Reverend," "Bishop" or other titles which make a distinction between men, but they considered themselves as brothers and joint heirs with Christ. (Matt. 23:7-10.)

As to government and organization of the church, they followed the Bible teaching on this matter. The Bible states that the oversight of the church is by elders or bishops (Acts 20:28) and that each local congregation is independent of any other rule. The qualifications for elders or bishops are given in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Understand this, that these men did not seek to start another religious body or church, because Christ instituted one church. This church was established on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, 33 A.D. It is quite possible to restore the church as it was in the beginning without creating a new one. For example: "A man buys an old residence. He builds on an ell, provides for an extra room by changing the pitch of the roof, adds on a front porch, and changes the interior. When he has finished he has changed the house; it has been reformed. (This is reformation.) Many years later another man becomes the owner. In an old chest in the attic he finds the architect's drawings, the original plans and specifications by which the house was built. As he looks at the original plans and the drawing of the house he is impressed with the beauty of the house as it was when first constructed. He calls in a contractor, shows him the plans, and tells him, 'I want the house put back as it was in the beginning. I want it to bear the same lines it had when first built.'

"Is that possible? Certainly! He has the plans, the pattern by which the house was constructed. The contractor has his men remove the front porch. They give the roof the same pitch it once had, the ell is removed and the interior is replaced as it was originally. New material has been added, to be sure, but it has been of the same kind, cut according to the specifications, and of the same dimensions. The appearance of the house is just the same now as it was when first built. It has been restored to its original lines. Here is restoration."² I would like now to submit a few statements concerning the work of these prominent men of the restoration period. "Years elapsed before James O'Kelly, Abner Jones, Elias Smith and Barton Stone learned of each other's work in their respective fields, but when they learned of the work of restoration that was being carried on by others, they saw that they were all striving for the same thing. They were not working for the reformation of any religious group, but for the ONE CHURCH of the New Testament. So we have religious leaders who once called themselves Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, all working for the restoration of the word of God as the only safe guide in religious matters."³ "The Restoration had its beginning at the right time. The reformation of Luther, Knox, Zwingli, and others, prepared the way for a complete return to the word of God and to the church of the New Testament. The men of the Restoration movement accepted all that the Reformers taught that was in harmony with the Bible, but they did not produce any creeds, confessions of faith, or church manuals, but accepted the word of God alone. Their efforts were directed not to reforming any church, but to the fulfillment of the prayer of the Savior, 'That they may all be one'."⁴

"The departure from God's word had not been made at one step. Little by little men changed the doctrine of Christ, altered the plan of salvation, and corrupted the worship of Christ's church. The return to the Bible will not be made by one step, but little by little as the doctrine of Christ is learned, it will be accepted, as the plan of salvation is unfolded it will be obeyed, and as the purity of the worship is revealed, it will be adopted." This concludes a brief summary of the restoration movement. It is my prayer that more people will return to the simple teaching of the New Testament as their only guide. (By Lindy McDaniel *Apostolic Doctrine* Jan. 1961)

1. *History of the Church through the Ages*, Robert Brumback, p. 355. 2. *Ibid.*, p. 355. 3. *Ibid.*, p. 297. 4. *Ibid.*, p. 313

If and Why

If a man is justified by faith only, why does the Bible say, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"? (James 2:24.)

If God's children cannot fall from grace, why did Paul say to the Galatians, "Ye are fallen from grace"? (Gal. 5:4.)

If water baptism was for Jews only, why did Peter "command" Cornelius and his house (Gentiles) to be baptized? (Acts 10:47,48.)

If Christians are supposed to worship on the sabbath, why did the disciples at Troas worship on "the first day of the week"? Acts 20:7.)

If the apostles were not verbally inspired, why did Paul say he spoke in "the words" which the Holy Spirit taught? (1 Cor. 2:13.)

If Christ is coming to set up the kingdom, why does the Bible say He is coming to "deliver up the kingdom to God"? (1 Cor. 15:23,24.)

—I. H.

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