

# Is the Restoration Movement Over?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Recent church statistics (Institutional and Non-Institutional)

1. Churches of Christ constitute the 12th largest religious group in America
2. Churches of Christ are the 6th fastest growing church in America.
3. Churches of Christ rank 4th in the nation in total congregations.
4. Churches of Christ rank 5th in the nation in the number of counties in which there is a congregation.
5. Churches of Christ rank 1st in the nation in distribution of congregations
6. Churches of Christ rank 1st in the nation in weekly attendance.
7. Churches of Christ rank 1st in the nation in giving.

B. "The Restoration Movement (also known as the American Restoration Movement or the Stone-Campbell Movement) is a Christian movement that began on the American frontier during the Second Great Awakening (1790–1870) of the early 19th century. The movement sought to restore the church and "the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament." Members do not identify as Protestant but simply as Christian."

"The Restoration Movement developed from several independent efforts to return to apostolic Christianity, but two groups, which independently developed similar approaches to the Christian faith, were particularly important. The first, led by Barton W. Stone, began at Cane Ridge, Kentucky and called themselves simply as "Christians". The second began in western Pennsylvania and Virginia (now West Virginia) and was led by Thomas Campbell and his son, Alexander Campbell; they used the name "Disciples of Christ". Both groups sought to restore the whole Christian church on the pattern set forth in the New Testament, and both believed that creeds kept Christianity divided. In 1832 they joined in fellowship with a handshake."

C. "The Restoration Movement has been characterized by several key principles:

1. Christianity should not be divided; Christ created one church.
2. Creeds divide, but Christians should be able to find agreement by standing on the Bible itself
3. Traditions divide, but Christians should be able to find common ground by following the practice of the early church.
4. Names of human origin divide, but Christians should be able to find common ground by using biblical names for the church

D. "A number of watchwords have been used in the Restoration Movement, which are intended to express some distinctive themes of the Movement

1. "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."
2. "The church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."
3. "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things love."
4. "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the divine."
5. "Call Bible things by Bible names." (A-C; Wikipedia)

- E. Has the work of restoration been completed in our time?
1. Some say no: Rick Warren, Mike Cope, Rubel Shelley, F. LaGard Smith want a new hermeneutic, new worship, new doctrines; radicalizing the Restoration Movement
  2. Others say no: change agents among our own brethren who find mocking the old ways more effective than defending their new views
  3. Some say yes: Claimants that the work of restoration is complete when congregations bring their work, worship, organization, and doctrine of salvation in line with New Testament authority. They believe it is no longer necessary to consider new questions, and codify their understanding into a creedal form (28 questions)
- F. Reason tells us that the work of restoration is a process that does not end
1. Men often depart from God's way, even sound men - 1Cor. 9:27
  2. Each generation needs to be reminded of God's way, or they will begin to depart it - Deut. 6:12
  3. There is no such thing as standing still; we either move forward or risk drifting back - Heb. 2:1
  4. Each generation builds on the work of the generation before. No one man can know and do it all perfectly - 1Cor. 3:10-15

## **I. A TRULY BIBLICAL RESTORATION MOVEMENT**

- A. Josiah's restoration (in this order)
1. Restored regular reading of God's word - 2Chron. 34:3; 2Kings 23:2
  2. Corrected worship; from the heart, sincere - 2Kings 23:3; 2Chron. 35:18
  3. Corrected organization and offices - 2Kings 23:4-8
  4. Corrected moral problems - 2Chron. 34:33; 2Kings 23:24
  5. Removed innovations - 2Kings 23:11-13
  6. Worked on this all of his life - 2Chron. 34:33
- B. Why didn't it last? It was built around one man
1. It was necessary for the whole nation to be committed from within themselves, not by borrowing another man's zeal or by being swept along with his enthusiasm
  2. What are you doing to maintain the Restoration?
    - a. Have you ever just sat down and read the Bible out loud to yourself? If you can read, but choose not to read, you are no better off than the illiterate.
    - b. Prayed out loud? Pray more than once per day? Pray more than a series of memorized lines?
    - c. How much time do you make for God each week?
  3. What is the NT church in Acts? Not just the work, worship, organization, and salvation doctrines. Those are important things, but NOT the only important things
    - a. Sacrificing, hospitable, loving, dedicated, etc.
    - b. So, have we restored the NT church?

## II. A TRULY RESTORED NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

- A. Embraces the power of God - Rom. 1:16; 1Cor. 1:18, 2:4-5; 2Cor. 13:4
  - 1. We don't just talk about God; we know Him. We don't just know the facts about God; we see Him by faith in His phenomenally powerful word
- B. Reaches out to gather in the lost - The whole book of Acts is filled with accounts of Christians engaged in the first and primary work of the church, gathering in the lost.
  - 1. The bigots were cast out, and the lost Gentiles gathered in
  - 2. The self-righteous were pushed aside to make room for the penitent
  - 3. They were dedicated to sharing the gospel with everyone
- C. Uses everyone's abilities - In New Testament times, there weren't spectators in the Church. There were only contributors, 100 percent participation.
  - 1. Not everyone is a preacher, elder or teacher, but everyone is given something to do by God, and is necessary to the success of the whole church - Eph. 4:11-16
- D. Provides loving support - Acts 2:42
  - 1. The Church isn't a business. It's not an organization. It's not a social club. It's a family.
- E. Engages in joyful worship - Acts 2:46
  - 1. It's a privilege, not a problem; it's a wonder, not a wake
  - 2. Do you think if local congregations were full of people with glad hearts, words of praise, and hopeful lives, unbelievers would want to know why?
  - 3. Do you want to worship with people who come in with sour faces, grumble their way through worship, and can't wait for the closing Amen?
- F. Makes generous sacrifices - Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37
- G. Pursues growth endlessly - Acts 2:47, 8:4

### Conclusion:

- A. Have we developed those characteristics to the same extent that we have the work, worship, organization, and salvation doctrines in this local church?
  - 1. No? Then the Restoration Movement has not come to an end here.