

What Constitutes Restoration

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Several years ago, my father-in-law bought a hunk of metal that at one time was a brand-spanking-new 1930 Model A. After much time and effort, he completed the restoration of that Model A to its original state. After all, that's what restoration is...restoring something back to its original condition, using original parts, original upholstery, original paint colors, etc.

So if restoration means to bring something back to its original condition, how does that apply to religion? There is certainly no argument that what you see in the religious world today is not what would have been seen in the 1st century church. That's an undeniable fact. So, why should we be concerned about restoration? And what constitutes restoration?

The first question I'll answer very briefly. We should be concerned about restoring the church to its original state because this is the Lord's church, not ours (Matt. 16:18). That means we need to have a church that is exactly as he designed and authorized. If a church today does not match up in doctrine and practice to the New Testament church, then it's no longer the Lord's church. Since the church was established on the Day of Pentecost, man has tried to change the Lord's design, and over the years, this has resulted in many apostasies and thousands of denominations.

Restoration is necessary, but what is necessary for restoration? Part of the answer lies in what I just said as to the reason for restoration. Restoration requires a careful examination of the Scriptures to see just what God had in mind for his church. He was very specific in authorizing what the church taught and practiced, and through a diligent search of the Bible, we can come to know exactly what he desires.

He promised his apostles that he would send the Holy Spirit to them to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). They didn't speak or write of their own will, but "*spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, what the apostles taught came straight from God and should be followed and obeyed. Man has no right to alter it.

All of this demands humility on our part. It necessitates a willingness to submit to God's will, regardless of what we want or how we think we'd like it to be. Without this humility, even if we search the Scriptures and discover discrepancies in our practices and the Scriptures, change will not take place. Restoration will not take place. Humility is at the heart of it all, and our heart must be attuned to God's will.

When we have the humility to subjugate ourselves to God's word and designs for the church, then we will diligently search the Scripture to see if what we are doing at our local church and what we are teaching is what the 1st century Christians did and what the apostles taught. If not, then we need to change to fit the pattern.

Is our worship music the same as in the pattern? Do we gather money in the same manner and for the same purposes? Is purchasing our own building in which to meet consistent with the pattern? Is our teaching on the necessity of salvation and how one is saved the same as what the

apostles taught? Every one of these questions, as well as many more, should be asked in the spirit of restoration. This is the attitude necessary to achieve the restoration of the Lord's church.

An instance of restoration in Nehemiah 8 illustrates two of these principles of restoration: humility and the lasting nature of God's laws. In this story, when the Israelites read the Law, they found how the Lord had commanded "*that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month*" (Neh. 8:14). When they read this and realized they had not been following God's commandment since the days of Joshua (about 1000 years prior!), they immediately obeyed his statute and made the booths in which to dwell and keep the feast.

They had the humility to accept what God had said and to admit that they had been wrong for 1000 years. They also understood that even though this law had been given 1000 years earlier, it was still valid. Just because that much time had passed didn't invalidate the commandment. Today, there are many who feel as if the Bible is antiquated and that many of its teachings are outdated. The Israelites understood otherwise. So should we when it comes to the teachings of the New Testament.

Restoration, however, does not apply only to the local church. In fact, it must start with our own individual lives. The principles are the same. We must have the humility to submit ourselves to the rule of King Jesus. It is imperative that we search the Scripture to find what kind of life he expects us to live. When we find discrepancies with the Word in our behavior, attitude, speech, and lifestyle, we must change to fit the pattern. When we do, then we will restore ourselves to the man God created and intended for us to be.

One final observation that is critical. Restoration, unlike with a car, is an ongoing process that is never finished. Why? Because people sin. Because people have pride. There is always something to restore in the church and in the individual. People will always drift away from the pattern and will always need to work on being restored back to the original pattern. Let us make it our constant effort to restore ourselves and the church of which we are members to the original design God gave.