

Is the Restoration Plea Valid?

by Lowell Blasingame

For years a basic difference between the preaching of the gospel preachers and denominational preachers has been our plea for a restoration of the church of the New Testament while they have taught that every man has the right to the church of his choice. We have insisted that by speaking where the Bible speaks and remaining silent where it is silent and by contending that scriptural authority is necessary for all that is taught and practiced in religion, we can restore the church of the New Testament.

Now a group of brethren are telling us that we have gone about our preaching in a wrong way and have antagonized and alienated our religious neighbors by this approach to the Scriptures. They tell us that we need a new set of rules or hermeneutics for applying and interpreting the Scriptures. ACU Press has released a book, *The Cruciform Church*, written by C. Leonard Allen, in which the restoration plea is ridiculed as one of the conceits of our time and we are told that we cannot return to the beginning and start all over again (Introduction, p. x).

Advocates of the new hermeneutics ridicule the plea for restoration by asking which church of the first century we want to restore, Laodecia with its indifference, or Corinth with its immorality, etc. Their conclusion seems to be that since these failed to be ideal that there is no pattern worthy of restoration. I agree that these churches were lacking in some things but suppose they heed the instructions given for correcting these faults, will they then become examples worthy of our emulation? Besides, there are some who received no censure. How about choosing the church at Smyrna or Philadelphia (Rev. 2-3) or the church at Philippi?

The assumption that corruption in a church in the first century eliminates an ideal for restoration is ridiculous. Shall we also assume that since false gospels were taught in the first century by Judaizers and Gnostics (Gal. 1:6-8) that we cannot sweep away the past and restore the true gospel of the first century? Is this another of the great conceits of our time to suppose that we can do this?

Is our plea for a restoration of the church of the first century a valid plea? I affirm that it is and do so for the following reasons.

First, the word of God is the seed of the kingdom. Matthew called it "the word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19) while Luke identifies it as "the seed" (Lk. 8:11). An irrevocable law of God says that a seed produces after its kind (Gen. 1:11). As long as a seed has life, it will produce the same kind of plant as that from which it came. And, if all of these plants are lost, the possibility of their being restored remains as long as their seed exists. Exactly the same is true regarding the kingdom or church of our Lord. Preaching the word produced the Lord's church during the first century and as long as we have the

word (seed), we have the potential for the restoration of the church. If not, why not? Why will it not make the same thing of those who believe and obey it today as it did 1990 or more years ago?

Second, the New Testament is a "form" of doctrine or of sound words (Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13). The word *hupotuposis*, used in 2 Timothy 1:13 also occurs in I Timothy 1:16 and is there translated "pattern." The New Testament is a form, a pattern or blueprint of what God wants his people individually and collectively to be. As Moses was forbidden to alter the pattern of the tabernacle (Heb. 8:5), we are forbidden to make changes in the teaching of Christ (I Pet. 4:11; 2 Jn. 9; 1 Cor. 4:6). Inasmuch as the New Testament is a pattern showing how to start a local church, what its organizational structure is, its mission and its worship, it follows that as long as we have a New Testament, we have the blueprint for restoring the church of the first century.

I do not know what kind of dress Martha Washington wore when her husband became the first president of our country. But I know that, if a seamstress has the material and pattern from which it was made, she can today make one exactly like it. As long as these exist, the dress can be restored. Equally as well, using the same material and following the same pattern today will restore the church of the first century.