

Restoration: Warnings & Remedies

PART 3

Baxter T. Exum (#1673)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together as God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us this morning, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

We are here today to hear and to share the good news that God loves us and that he sent his only Son Jesus to die in our place. He was born in Bethlehem, lived a perfect life, and was killed for it. He was buried, but he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey this good news by turning to him in faith, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And we do have several examples today, starting with an update from Katrina Moore, who lives in Camden, Alabama. She posted online this week and says,

Praising God my two heartbeats they got baptized today! Keep putting God first everything else going to come into place. I love both of you. Can't stop these tears! Congrats Kristi & Kristan.

Great news out of Alabama this week!

This next one comes to us Roger Leonard, from Adel, Georgia. He says,

NEVER GIVE UP! I am most happy to announce that Eugene Dillard was baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins on Sunday evening, December 18. He has been faithful in attendance with the church of Christ in Adel for more years than I know (I've been there for 11+ yrs). He never misses a meeting of the church if he can help it, and since he lives in a local healthcare facility someone has to pick him up. Many have tried to convince him that he needed to do this, but he would not change. He said had been baptized as a boy but did not remember why. Finally, Tony Chance talked with him a few times recently and convinced him to become a Christian, so he did! I asked him yesterday if Tony had been talking with him about being baptized and he said he had. He asked if we would do it in our building and I said that we could. So last evening, Mike Kalinowski and Tony Chance helped him up the steps and down into the baptistry. Because his back is rigid and he has to use a walker, it took both of them to immerse him but they did a fine job. A person should know why they are being baptized, and that it has to be for what the Bible says. To God be all the glory!

This next one comes to us from Brent Missiledine, who preaches in Prattville, Alabama (where Laverne Becker worships, one of our former members). Brent says,

God's mighty power was shown today as Chris Williams was buried with Christ in baptism today at Encompass Rehab hospital! Just a short time ago, Chris was very near death after multiple massive strokes, seizures, and brain surgery. But God has mercifully brought him an amazing amount of recovery and Chris knew the Lord had spared him to give him a chance to change his heart and life. At the encouragement of his grandmother, Joyce Hargrove, Chris and I have had a series of Bible studies that have led to faith and repentance in his heart. Today, with the help of the wonderful staff at Encompass, we heard his confession of faith and witnessed his baptism into Christ! What a witness to God's power and grace! Please pray for this new brother in Christ.

And this last one is a baptism that happened on this date (December 25) back in 1898 (124 years ago). The caption says that "Grace Allen is baptized by Evangelist H. Cosman in the congregation's presence after cutting out a hole in a FROZEN LAKE." This just seemed appropriate for today! But we share all of these by way of encouragement. What these people have done, you can do this morning, right here in this building. If you would like to learn more, please pull me aside after the service today.

This morning, we are continuing in a brief series of lessons where we are looking at a good question that came from one of our young adults who wants to know: How do we as Christians answer this question a friend asked me, "How do you know that your version of Christianity is the right one?" It's a great question, and we started two weeks ago by suggesting a possible "short answer," and that is: By taking the Bible as our only authority, we are doing the best we can to restore simple, New Testament Christianity. That's the short answer. We're not really defending "our version of Christianity" as the right one, but we are trying to communicate that our goal is to honor scripture and to use the word of God as a pattern as we try to restore simple, New Testament Christianity.

Two weeks ago, then, we started by looking at the CONCEPT of restoration by looking together at what happened back in the time of King Josiah (in 2 Kings 22). Josiah takes over as king at only 8 years old, the people have left God completely, but as he has the temple cleaned out, they find God's law, and when they are not sure they go to God for clarification (through Huldah the prophetess).

Last week, we looked at what happens next (in 2 Kings 23) as a case study in restoration. King Josiah starts with a commitment to follow God's law no matter what, he destroys everything that is not allowed or authorized under the Law, he re-institutes what God had commanded (in this case, the Passover), and he does this, even though he knows that his efforts will probably not be appreciated by the next generation. He persists.

Well, this morning, I'd like for us to move on as we start to apply all of this to where we are today, as we apply this to life under the New Covenant. Next week we hope to start the new year by thinking about what a restored church should look like. This week, though, let's take a quick look at some warnings against changing God's plan, followed by some basic principles involved in fixing it once it happens – because we look around us, it it has definitely happened.

I. **First of all, though, let's notice a few passages warning about THE DANGER OF CHANGING GOD'S PLAN FOR HIS CHURCH.**

There are many, but the first in our study today comes from Acts 20. In context, the apostle Paul has spent three years establishing and strengthening the church in Ephesus, and now he's passing back through the area and meeting with the elders of the church. They're meeting on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea near Miletus, and as he encourages these men, he says in Acts 20:28-31,

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

So, the church is just a few years old at this point, and Paul warns that a time is coming when men would arise (even from within the eldership of the congregation), speaking things that are false, for the purpose of drawing away disciples after them. In other words, mere humans would tamper with the divine message, for their own benefit. Paul, then warns these men to ***“be on guard”*** and to ***“be on the alert.”***

In 1 Timothy 4, we have another warning from Paul to the young preacher Timothy (who was actually preaching in Ephesus at the time). In 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Paul says,

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

So, in this passage, a few years after the one we just read from Acts, Paul is warning Timothy that a time was coming when some would fall away from the true faith and would pay attention to strange teachings. Some religious leaders, in fact, would be hypocrites with seared consciences. In other words, they have no feeling – they’ve sinned so long that they have no sense of right and wrong, and these men would make up rules for the church – they would forbid marriage, they would ban certain foods (ultimately leading to the rise of Friday fish fries in Wisconsin). But these men would actually leave the faith while actually sounding very religious. They would change the divine message, and Paul warns about this.

The next warning also comes from Paul to Timothy, only this one comes in 2 Timothy 4, right before Paul is executed by Rome for preaching the gospel. These are some of Paul’s last words (in 2 Timothy 4:1-5) where he says,

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This is important to Paul. There is a time coming when certain men would try to change the divine message, and this time Paul makes a point of saying that they will do this with the full support of the church. There was a time coming when those who heard the message would demand preachers who would preach only what they wanted to hear, leading to the preaching of myths, leading preachers to just make up stuff. Paul, then, tells the young preacher Timothy: Do not give in to this! ***“Preach the word (of God) in season and out of season.”*** As Marshall Keeble used to say, “Preach it when they like it, and preach it when they don’t!”

Not only do these warnings PREDICT a departure from the faith, but we also have warnings as this departure is happening. Galatians 1:6-9, for example, Paul says,

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

And then we also have a similar situation in Corinth (in 1 Corinthians 1), where the church in Corinth had started to divide based on the names of their favorite preachers. This is 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, where Paul says,

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Sometimes we warn about "denominations." To "denominate" is to divide by name. It started all the way back when Paul was still alive, and it continues to this day in a way that would shock the apostle Paul. We have a "Saint Paul" church right here in this neighborhood. Can we even imagine what Paul might do if he saw his name on a church sign? Terrible things would happen. I don't know whether Paul would be able to restrain himself. The point is: The Bible warns about this. We are not to divide by name, and yet here we are. These are the warnings.

II. This leads us to think for a moment about the REMEDY.

Once we've left God's word in some area, once we've divided religiously, how do we fix this? How do we make it right? Where do we go from here? If we've left the word of God, obviously, we need to go back. We need to realize that the word of God should serve as a pattern for his church. It's not our church, it's his, and so out of respect for him, we take his word as a guide. Just as Moses built the tabernacle according to God's pattern (in Hebrews 8:5), so also God's church has a pattern. In Romans 6:17, Paul says that the Christians in Rome had become obedient from the heart to that "**form**" (or pattern) of teaching to which they were committed. Paul uses a word referring to the impression made by a stamp or a die. I think of a typewriter. Just as that key makes an impression (through the ink) on a piece of paper, so also the word of God is to make an impression on our hearts. And the impression the word makes on my heart should be the same impression it makes on your heart. And when both of us obey the word, we agree.

Another way of illustrating this would be to think about the seed principle. Back at the beginning (in Genesis 1:12), God established the truth that certain plants would propagate by producing seed that would reproduce after their kind. We understand this. At our house this year, we experimented with more than a dozen varieties of peppers – hot peppers, some of those seeds came with warning labels (only handle with protective equipment, and so on). But we understand that for us to grow a pepper that originated in Mexico, we don't need to have a pepper plant stretch 2,000 from there to up here. No, all we need is the seed. We take a seed from a plant down there, we plant it up here, and we have the same plant here that they have there. A seed reproduces after its kind.

Well, in the New Testament, Jesus tells a parable where he compares the word of God to a seed. He speaks of the word of God being sown along the side of the road, and on the rocky ground, and among the thorns, and on the good soil. But the point for us is: The seed is the word of God, and whenever and wherever the word of God sprouts and

grows, it should always bring about the same result. In other words, the message given to the churches in Ephesus and Rome 2,000 years ago should have the same result when preached in Madison and Milwaukee.

In fact, the gospel message is self-replicating, at least it should be. We think of Paul saying to Timothy (in 2 Timothy 2:2), *“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* This continues what Jesus says to the original apostles in Matthew 28:19-20, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* Teach others, who will teach others, who will teach others *“to observe all that I commanded you.”* The word of God is like a seed. To grow what they grew, we must use the same seed (the word of God).

Conclusion:

This morning, we’ve looked at some concepts and passages to try to help us answer the question, “How do you know that your version of Christianity is the right one?” Today, we’ve noted the warnings concerning the danger of changing God’s message, and we’ve looked at the remedy – to think of the word of God as a pattern and as a seed. I know we haven’t looked at too many specifics this morning, but I hope to head in that direction next Sunday.

As we think about the many changes that have been made in the name of Christianity over the past 2,000 years, I’d like to close this morning by sharing a parable that we shared a number of years ago, the Parable of the Man Who Loved Outdoor Cooking. And as I share the parable, I’ve put a picture of our grill up here.

Once upon a time, there was a man who loved outdoor cooking. He loved to grill out in his backyard. He loved the outdoors. In fact, he loved it so much that he built a huge BBQ pit, and he put a picnic table out there. And then, to make it a bit easier to avoid the mud around the table, the next year he poured a concrete slab out there. After a while, he upgraded to a very nice table and chairs for the new patio. After a few cookouts were ruined by rain and snow, he decided to build a roof over the patio, and while he was at it he put a chimney through the roof along with a range hood to pull out the smoke. And since the hood required electricity, he thought, “Why not?” and since the electrician was already there, he added some lighting and electrical outlets for his coffee maker. Summer came around, and he added screen around the perimeter to keep the bugs out. Winter rolled around, and he added walls and windows. And then, to to it up right, he built a tile-covered workspace, along with a counter top, complete with a double sink and running water. The man just loved outdoor cooking!

The same thing has happened to the simplicity of simple New Testament Christianity, and our goal (in all humility) is to go back, all the way back, and to think of God’s word as a seed. If that ancient seed is planted today, we put our trust in the power of God’s word to grow today what it grew back then. I’m looking forward to coming back together next week to look at some very practical ways we can restore the simplicity of the early church.

As we start preparing our minds for the Lord’s Supper, let’s pray together:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning as the creator and designer of your kingdom, the church. Thank you for your living and active word, a collection of inspired words that you have described as a seed. We pray for honest and humble hearts, and we pray that as your word lands in our hearts that it would sprout and grow and that your word would bear much fruit, that it would change us from the inside out.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of your Son who came to this earth in human form, to live among us, to feel what we feel, and to ultimately die in our place.

We come to you through Jesus, who gave his life for us on the cross. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com