

THE RESTORATION PLEA

Allen Webster

The restoration plea has been taught in our land for two centuries now, yet many in this generation have not heard it. It says,

Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Let us call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. Let's restore the church as it was in the days of the apostles.

When one speaks of a restoration plea, four things are implied.

The restoration plea implies that God had a plan for the church.¹

In the basement of America's largest home, the Biltmore mansion in Asheville, North Carolina, there is a model of the structure. The model was completed first as a guide to build the home. In Barcelona, Spain, you can visit the still unfinished Sagrada Familia Church. They have been working on it for fifty years. They have a model of what the building will look like when it is finished.

The restoration plea implies that God had a plan for the church, which He revealed to man (Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:44; Ephesians 3:10-11).

God has always had a pattern.

- Noah's ark (Genesis 6:22; 7:5);
- Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8-9);

¹ These points are not original, but I do not know from whom I first heard or read them.

- Temple (1 Chronicles 28:11-19);
- Jericho's walls (Joshua 6; Hebrews 11:30);
- Naaman's cleansing (2 Kings 5:1-14).

Isaiah prophesied of the coming kingdom, showing that God was already making plans for the church seven centuries before it came to be. He said,

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Notice that Isaiah said God would "teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Jesus sent out the apostles to teach those paths (Mark 16:15-16). Since the early church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42; cf. 4:32), we know God's messengers got His plan for the church delivered to the early Christians. Just as the fullness of God is in Christ (Colossians 1:19; 2:9) and God has no plans for salvation for the world outside of Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), so the church is the fullness of Christ, and Christ has no plans for the world outside of His church (Ephesians 3:21).

The restoration plea implies that God expects us to continue to follow His plan.

The restoration plea implies that God expects us to continue to follow His plan in each succeeding generation. Paul wrote, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also"

(2 Timothy 2:2). God wanted His pattern followed century after century.

The Bible emphasizes patterns. In constructing the tabernacle, Moses was warned by God that he must "make all things according to the pattern" (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5). Paul spoke of the "pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13 ASV) which early Christians were taught and in which they were to abide (2 Timothy 3:14). These Christians obeyed a "form" of doctrine (Romans 6:17-18) and "marked" (were on the lookout for) those who departed from that pattern (Romans 16:17). When it came to the doctrine of the New Testament, they earnestly contended for the faith (Jude 3), were warned about falling away from the faith (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:1-4), and were not to go "beyond the things which are written" (1 Corinthians 4:6 ASV). Each generation was charged not to teach a "different doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3 ASV).

Warnings not to go beyond the teaching of Christ abound in the New Testament (Galatians 1:6-9; Matthew 15:13; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 22:18-19). John said explicitly:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 1:9-11).

The restoration plea implies that man left God's pattern.

By becoming too well known, a product can lose its distinctiveness. The Trademark Association calls this problem "genericide." Marlin Connelly gives some examples:

All facial tissue is called Kleenex,
Any gelatin dessert is Jello,
Any clear, sticky tape is Scotch Tape,

Any carbonated drink is a Coke (at least in the South), Any adhesive bandage is a Band-Aid.

Today the words *Christian* and *Christianity* have become generic. Once brand names for a definite product, they are now used for any kind of vague religion connected loosely with the historical Christ. In the minds of some, the rigid New Testament ethical code is now fluid and accommodating. Doctrines that in Bible times were black and white are now gray and faded. Practices that were then commanded are now optional. For instance, the creed book of the largest Protestant denomination states,

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism," and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, "baptism was the door into the church." Now, it is different.²

² Hiscox, Edward T. 1890. *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*. Philadelphia, PA: The American Baptist Publication Society, page 22.



Why is it different today? God has not changed His mind. Men have usurped authority not belonging to them and changed God's church into something different from what He intended. Surely God wants us to return to His original vision for the church.

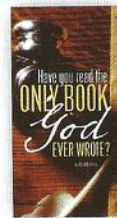
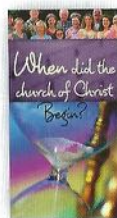
The restoration plea implies that God wants His people to restore His original pattern today.

In the long ago, God's prophet urged, as we do today, "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16).



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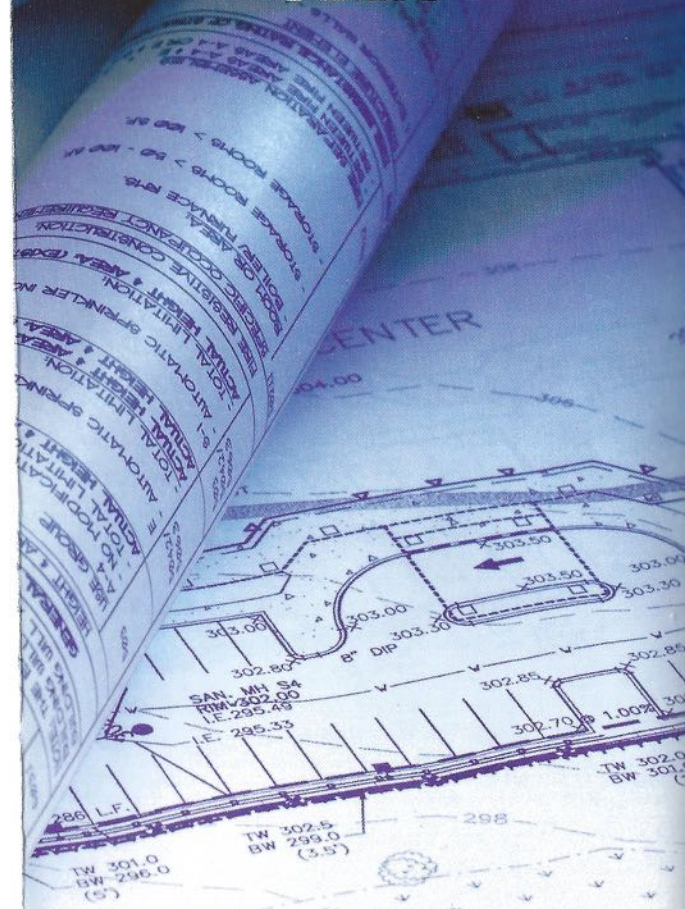
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