THE RESTORATION

By

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When people talk about the "restoration" of the church, they generally refer to running the church according to the directions the apostles gave in solving problems in the early churches. Often it includes restoring the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to their rightful places.

Nothing wrong with that! But after that's done, the church may still be a long way from "restored."

The land is full of people who are happy to "go to church," be part of the crowd, listen to the sermon and return home to a self-centered life. Through the week the truth of Christ is choked out by the cares of life and the deceitfulness (and pursuit) of riches (Matt. 13:22).

The message of Jesus — "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." "Woe to you that are rich" — has been turned around, so that the ideal of a successful Christian is one who is comfortably well-off, secure, a member of a suburban church where no one comes in contact with the poor, where most members hunger and thirst for recreation instead of righteousness and the pure in heart are considered fanatics.

In Christ's Sermon on the Mount no longer applicable? When did He rescind it? Who gave Falwell and his Moral Majority the power to delete "Blessed are the peacemakers?" Is it really true that the popularity of a church shows that it is accomplishing Christ's work? Then why did Jesus say, "Blessed are you when men shall reproach you, and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake?"

We still tend to see the "church" as the Sunday morning crowd attending to the carefully orchestrated worship directed by professionals. Some even argue over the *order* of the program, when there is no program outlined anywhere in Scripture! But *there is* an outline for the individual lives of all the members. What difference whether singing is done a cappella or to the accompaniment of a million-dollar pipe organ, if the worshipper has not come, contritely and humbly, to receive the mercy of God?

Restoration begins by restoring Christ's life in individuals. One may change certain patterns in the congregation to more nearly coincide with the patterns given in the new Testament, and many claim that they are operating the "church" exactly "according to pattern," although we find no completely uniform pattern among New Testament churches, but even so, this is only the function of the group. The life of each individual is quite another thing. Reformers and restorationists have a burning ambition to change the policies of the church, but how often is that ambition matched with the desire to restore their own lives to the image of God as seen in the teachings of Jesus?

Christ was a "restorationist." :He would restore man to the image of God, right back to the original pattern. Therefore His teaching was revolutionary. He by-passed the institutions, where the purpose of God had been totally hidden under matted layers of les, and began with the individual. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He gave a completely new concept of happiness and joy, based upon a totally different value system.

It is time for another revolution. The society we live in has made up an arbitrary list of requirements for the successful and happy person: things, physical beauty, youth, sex, luxury, security! And "born again" church members often are just as intent upon attaining these goals as are the rest of the world.

Churches are filled with people who have been swept into it through well-planned programs without ever having considered the basic requirements given by Jesus: "If any man would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The world's value-system must be challenged and denied in the Christian's life.

What we need is a restoration of the values Christ preached and demonstrated. Meekness, rather than the ego-busting pride that makes us bask in the company of the highly-esteemed and look down on the rest. Righteousness, which, after God, is to be first of all on our priority list. Mercy, which we can embrace only as we learn our own desperate need for it ourselves. Purity of heart, which means to have the singular ambition to be like Christ, to will the will of God.

Accepting Christ's standard of values is the test of our faith. Can God really give us happiness without giving us all the artificial needs the world continually offers? Will He supply our needs, if we give our substance to the poor? In these days when law-suits are the style, can we love our enemies and survive? To believe Christ is to believe that the life-style He outlined for us is the true pattern for a twentieth century Christian. If we do not take Him at His word on this, how can we believe He will come and grant us eternal life?

The world takes little note of all the discussion and debate over the "restoration" of church. It will pay attention only when the members of the church restore in their own lives the life Jesus exemplified. Then we may become the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world."

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