

618 Why do we need to restore Christianity?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

If you look at contemporary Christianity and compare that with the teaching of Scripture, you find a big gap. Is God happy with today's religion, or is there something better. Stay tuned and we'll look for God's Answers.

Some people restore furniture, others restore cars, and still others restore houses. To restore something means to bring it back to its original state or its ideal state—the way it was meant to be. When we speak of restoring the church, we mean bringing it back to the way God intended it to be. Some churches survey their neighbors, asking what they want out of a church. But what people want out of a church may not be what God wants from the church. If the church belongs to God, not people, we should let God speak out about what He wants. Perhaps one reason we have so much confusion in religion today is that we haven't listened to God.

If we say that something needs restoring, we are suggesting that it is not what it should be, that something is wrong and needs to be corrected. To suggest the church needs restoring means that it is not what it should be and needs to be corrected. We can easily see many differences between the church God you can read about in your New Testament and the churches we see all about us today. According to the World Christian Databank there are 635 denominations in the USA alone. The Lord never intended that there be so many different groups with differing names, creeds and practices. He wanted His people to be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Some people think that it is good to have so many churches, that way everyone can go to the church of his own choice. But if everyone can have his own church, what place does God have. The church, as you know, doesn't belong to us; it belongs to the Lord. Jesus said in Matt. 16:18, "Upon this rock, I will build my church." In Acts 20:28, we learn that Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. Paul said that Jesus was the head of the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). He also says in Eph. 5:23 that Jesus is the Savior of the body. Now if the church belongs to Jesus, it can't belong to us. If Jesus is the Lord of the church, then we have no right to change it to suit ourselves.

Jesus reveals to us, further, that He himself walks among His churches and will judge them. John 12:48 reveals that all shall be judged by His teaching, His word. The same standard will be applied to all. He doesn't have one Bible for one group and a different Bible for other groups. Paul said that God is not partial to one over another (Rom. 2:11). God expects those who follow Him to do His will, not to invent their own churches. When a group gets away from the teaching of the word and establishes their own church after their own desires, they are not following the will of God. Religious people can easily fool themselves into thinking that their practices are righteous, when they are not.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Calling Jesus 'Lord' is not the same as obeying Him. Appearing religious is not the same as being righteous. Jesus said in Matthew 15:13 about the Pharisees, who were binding man-made laws, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up." What did He mean by that? He meant that human religion and human traditions will not stand before God. God will not recognize churches that follow their own will rather than His will. God does not approve of humanly-devised religion.

What happens, then, when a church gets away from the will of God? What should it do? The answer is simple: repent! That is what Jesus was preaching to the Pharisees in their day and would say to us

today. "Repent!" Repentance is a turning away from the worldly and human and a turning toward the way of the Lord. We should not think that all sin is moral. Some sin is doctrinal. In ancient times some teachers were teaching a false doctrine about Jesus; they said that He did not come in the flesh. John said in 2 John 9-11, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." Evil deeds? Why are they evil? Because they are deceptive and teach something that is false about Jesus. When a person does not tell the truth, he is a deceiver. Now, many a good person has been deceived. What do you do when you find out you have been deceived? You correct the situation. You abandon the false doctrine or the false practice and come back to God's will and God's way of doing things. This is what one does to restore his relationship with God—he repents.

In the Old Testament we have some examples of the Kings of Judah repenting of the evils of their time. King Hezekiah in the eighth century BC was just such a king. In 2 Kings 18:3-6 King Hezekiah, whose heart belonged to God, restoring Judah's worship. He tore down the places of idolatry, cleansed the temple, and began keeping the Passover. "He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *among those* who were before him. For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses." God blessed Hezekiah greatly.

About a hundred years later another king, Josiah, found that his people were not keeping God's laws the way they should. What happened was that the book of the Law had been lost in the temple, and the people did not know or practice what the Law said. When Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the Law, he gave it to Shaphan, who read it to King Josiah. 2 Kings 22 says that when Josiah heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes, a sign of great anguish. He said, "great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." Josiah had to do something! He gathered all the people of Judah together, "all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2-3). The rest of the chapter tells how he got rid of everything idolatrous and evil. He cleaned up Judah completely. He pledged himself to follow God in everything.

They began to celebrate the Passover, "as it is written in the book of the covenant." To do things right, we must do them as the Bible instructs, not how we think or we want. It was about this time that Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk *in it*'" (Jer. 6:16). Some people today are much like that. They want what is new and appealing rather than what God wills. They fail to please God because they are busy pleasing people. You can build

the largest church in Tennessee; but if it doesn't follow the will of God, it doesn't please God.

Jesus emphasized the changeless nature of the Word of God by saying, "It is written." (Matt. 4:1-11). That is, God said it, and it is still His will. In his discussions He often asked, "Have you not read?" Or "Is it not written...?" Or "What is written in the Law?" Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a kind of "restoration" sermon pointing people back to God's will rather than popular religion. He would contrast the popular ideas of the time with what He had to say. "You have heard that it was said..., but I say to you" was a familiar line in that Sermon. Jesus wanted the Jews to get away from their human traditions and back to what God says and wills for their lives.

Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in 2 Peter 2:1-3 predicted false teachers would arise, "among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep." Today there are kinds of preachers saying all kinds of things. A heresy is a doctrine coming from man that he presses until he divides the church. He uses it to exploit people and to fulfill his own desires.

Paul warned Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "the time is coming when people will not endure sound (healthy) teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." We live in just such a time, when people get so caught up in what they like to hear that they do not ask, "What does God will?" What people want and what God wills are often two very different things. Some folks have turned their churches into theaters with all kinds of entertainment. A large crowd, but is that what God wills? Others have substituted their human practices for the God-given ones.

Where do you read of churches playing musical instruments in worship in the New Testament? Where do you read of infant baptism? Where do you read of baptism as sprinkling? Where do you read of special priests, special holidays, lent, holy water, or archbishops, or doctrines like purgatory or limbo or being saved by "faith alone"? These are all doctrines of men; they have a starting point long after the New Testament. Please understand, these are not Biblical doctrines but came from men hundreds of years after the New Testament. If we want to restore the Christianity of the New Testament, then we must cast aside these practices and doctrines of men.

Restoration means not having anything in the church which was not expressly taught and authorized by the Scripture. These human practices actually divide Christians. The way to unity is to leave these human practices and doctrines and return to the teaching of the New Testament. Christians will never unite until only the Lord rules in His church. As long as men have their way, the church will face having to choose between people and God, between what is popular and what is right. This is an age-old fight, but God's faithful people will choose

the narrow, right way instead of the easy, broad way. The narrow way leads to life, but the broad way leads to destruction (Mt. 7:13-14).

What we need today more than anything is God's imperishable word, the word that made Christians in the first century still makes Christians today. The commandments of God in the first century are still the word of God today. It is an eternal message for all time. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." When you and I face God in judgment, these words will still be there and will matter greatly. Jude 3 reminds us to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all time delivered to the saints. The word that was given then was for all time and for our time. We ought to give it our attention and our obedience.

"Let us cast aside every human creed, name, and practice and go to the Bible for our rule of faith and practice. Let's call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." These are things some leaders of the restoration said in the early 1800s. They were good then, and they are good now, because they reflect the kind of change that God blesses—a change that gives His word first place in our lives. Let us go back to the Bible in everything! One reason religion is so messed up in America is because the Bible has not been allowed to be the final word in what churches believe and practice.

We must resolve ourselves to do God's will if we are going to call Jesus 'Lord' and enter into the kingdom of heaven. The first step is faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ. Second we must repent of every sin and turn ourselves around to serve Him. Third, we ought to confess Jesus as the Lord and Christ before all. Fourth, we need to be baptized, immersed in water, so that God will wash away our sins and add us to His church. We need to do these things because the Scriptures teach them. I hope you will today.

James said in James 1:22-25, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." We must look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word and ask ourselves what things need to be changed to conform to His will. Then let us change them.

Let us become the people that God can bless because we do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names. Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Let us cast aside all that is human and devote ourselves to serving the Living God. Let us call Jesus 'Lord' and mean it because we serve Him and Him alone. Now, the only way that we can know God's will is to read and study the New Testament. We must look into its pages, asking what God instructs us to do in order to please Him. We must study and practice what He teaches. My friend, would you make the decision today to follow the Word of God and leave behind the teaching of men?

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