

RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

WDXE – AUGUST 14, 2011

Churches of Christ throughout the world plead for the restoration of original Christianity. In order to do this these churches rely upon the information we find in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is there a **need** in the world for this kind of original Christianity?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

The English word "restore" means "to bring back to an original state or condition. To put back something into its former state." If we are seeking to restore the original condition of Christ's first century church, then we are implying that the Lord's church has suffered deterioration over the years. Has the church suffered decline and deterioration over the centuries? Anyone who carefully reads the New Testament of Jesus Christ and then examines the Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity is struck by the differences in the original and the modern varieties. Every aspect of primitive Christianity has suffered from the attempts of men to change the church into their liking. The apostle Paul warned that this would happen.

In Paul's last letter to Timothy, his son in the faith, Paul wrote, "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Tim 4:3-5 (ESV).) Friends, can you look at the present state of Christianity in the world and see that what was "coming" has come? There are indeed teachers who suit their own passions and preach to people who have turned away from listening to the truth. Are you one of them? Are you one of those who has turned away from listening to God?

The causes of this devilish attitude among believers in Christ are found one chapter back in second Timothy: chapter 3, beginning at verse one. "...In the last

days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” (2 Tim 3:1-5 (ESV).) In those attitudes described here were found the seeds of apostasy.

Not only did Christ’s apostle Paul warn of this corrosion among Christians, but the apostle Peter also warned the church. Speaking of an earlier time, Peter wrote, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ 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.” (2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV).) Well, it may appear to us that the destruction of false teachers and false teaching is asleep, but it is not. Yes, it is true that there are still false teachers and false doctrines among believers in Christ. How will you know the difference? Friends, if YOU are asleep, you will NOT know the difference. But if you will read and study the New Testament of Jesus Christ, then you can know the difference. The difference becomes very obvious. Read carefully your New Testament and then examine the Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity and you will be struck by the differences between the modern rituals and the original pattern.

One of the first things that changed in the early church of Christ was its form of government. The New Testament churches of Christ had simple congregational government with local elders shepherding their flocks, and younger deacons who served the churches in various capacities. Early in the second century this simplicity began to change. A hierarchy of authority was built that was completely unscriptural. Ultimately local authority was usurped by powerful men called bishops who had control of a multitude of congregations. Finally these

changes in government took on the political trappings of the Roman Empire, culminating in the Papacy.

During the Protestant reformation, the Protestants steered away from this unscriptural authoritarian model and for a time went back to a local congregational model, declaring that they would follow the New Testament. However, eventually, the Protestants also began to build their hierarchies! The modern versions show pyramid arrangements with a headquarters somewhere. Churches of Christ, on the other hand, are restoring the New Testament pattern of local churches with local elders and deacons.

Along with the second century changes in government, the men leading the way toward apostasy began to be called by unscriptural names. They became known as a special class of priests; then from among the priests there arose bishops, cardinals, and finally the “father” of all, the Pope. This development was completely the opposite of Christ’s desires for his leaders. In talking to his disciples about the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said, “**They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**” (Matt 23:5-12 (ESV).)

These unscriptural changes that came upon the early Christians did not happen overnight. The changes came slowly, they were subtle, incremental changes. The leaders were stepping farther and farther away from the New Testament. The way to restore the original is to go back to what those people left. They left New Testament teaching; so to restore the church of Jesus Christ we must go back to New Testament teaching.

The unscriptural changes we have mentioned only touch the “hem of the garment”! There are many more. But these changes are mentioned to illustrate

the great problem that believers in Jesus Christ have in the world today. That great problem is division. And that division is rooted in those unscriptural hierarchies. Believers in Christ should NOT **form** a new denomination! NEITHER should believers in Christ **reform** old structures that were created by men over the centuries! Believers in Christ should go back to the original authority, the New Testament of Jesus Christ. He is our Savior. He is the Head of the church. He has spoken through the Holy Spirit and those words have been faithfully written in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. In order to restore the church of Christ as it existed in the first century we must go back to the source, the Word of God. This is the plea of churches of Christ in the world today.

Jesus Christ had a plan for His church. He said he would build his church and the gates of hades would not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18.) That means that even death itself could not destroy the church of Jesus Christ! False teaching can have its effect upon the church only when false teaching is NOT confronted by the truth of the New Testament. But if we believe what we read in Christ's word, false teaching can be conquered in our lives. False teaching is conquered one courageous person at a time and one courageous church at a time. One person looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word. This person is blessed in his doing. (James 1:25.) If we let Him, Jesus can build us into the church of Christ according to his plan.

When a person obeys the gospel of Christ the Lord adds him to his church. (Acts 2:47.) This person then worships and serves the Lord Jesus by living by the Lord's New Testament. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15.)

Friends, do you know the difference between the church of the New Testament and the counterfeits? Wouldn't you rather be JUST A CHRISTIAN and UNDENOMINATED? It will take restoration!

