

The restoration of the church. There's no greater privilege we will ever have than that of being part of the restoration of the church. Restoration began in the Old Testament with the destruction of and the rebuilding of the temple. Then, when the day of Acts had come, the apostles came together to speak about the restoration of no less than the kingdom of God. We have had the beginning. We had the Reformation, which was actually a complete failure. We are now faced with a restoration in a day that is not conducive to restoration. Yet, restoration is, without question, more difficult than even the beginnings and more difficult than the reformation itself. Yet what a fate, what a purpose.

The end of the first-century church can be marked around 313 with the rise of the Roman emperor Constantine. Everything since then has moved further away from what had once been, but along the way, there have been those Christians who are in the footnotes of church history, and in every one of them, we see a pattern. A rise to restore, a laying hold of things never known in the institutional church, and then, after no more than a generation or two, the loss of all that was gained. Yet they left us... without exception... they left us such a legacy.

The first question I ever asked of a man who had left the institutional church in his youth was now an older man. I asked, "What good is there to restore when you know in a generation or two it will be lost?" And he answered, "You are responsible for the generation in which you live. Faithfulness to God in the generation you presently live." I've never had a question since that time. Furthermore, just because restoration has never been restored for a long period of time does not mean it's not possible. With every generation that has stood to say that what we have is not proper, and this was the way it was in the beginning; every one of those had to fight the surrounding mindset that they were in and face the enemies who are so determined to make sure they don't rise, and if they do, not last very long. But that doesn't mean it can't be done. It's a lack of imagination and of faith to look back on those stalwart Christians before us who tried so hard, yet we haven't even begun to move toward a restoration even similar to what God had in His church in the beginning. Yes, there is still, regardless of what darkness or what horizon seems to never allow us a new sun to rise. Restore. Restore. Restore is the heart cry of every one of the faithful of God. In every generation, we get a little bit clearer about just how vast the task before us is.

I live in a nation that was actually born after the Reformation. There's no record of us burning people at the stake. There are no dungeons. There are no great vilifications of any work that has been raised up in my country, America. The Europeans have the castles, the dungeons, and the history of the dissidents and radicals. We have had none of this. We have had the blessing and the curse of freedom of religion. That does not mean that this nation must forever remain void of the history of those who came before us. Nor does it mean there are not enough hearts to stand up today. Having seen the revelation of Jesus Christ, hearing their hearts cry, restore, restore.

One of our simplest problems is that we look around at what we see everywhere and assume that there have been men who have at least thought through how we arrived at the place we are. With the silence and unthought-of assumption that there must be at least some things that we're doing

today that men pondered over and sought to bring back that were of the first century. That's pretty well where our non-thought is. The truth of the matter is, despite our devotion to Christ, despite our songs, our heroic efforts, what we are doing right now is we are living in a pond that has nothing to do with the great ocean that came before us. These are the things that we will and must awaken in the hearts of God's people. What we have here today is not only far afield, but in a totally different field than the first motions, first days, the first century.

Another misgiving is that those people who were in the first centuries and those who were into restoration throughout the generations thereafter were somehow made out of a better stuff than we are. It makes for good negative preaching, but it is not true. We're no better. We're no worse. We have luxury. Those are people who left their luxuries. We have an easy life. There were many who had an easy life, but they gave it up. These are not matters of surroundings; these are matters of the heart. There have been, and always will be, those who, having seen something in a far distant vision, rise up out of the unction of the Holy Spirit and the devotions they have for Christ to join in that lineage of those who dare.

Look at the church today. We walk into a beautiful edifice. We see a stained-glass window, a pew, a pulpit, an oratorical platform, and we certainly see an oratorical demonstration. We have seminaries. We have almost completely lost church history on this continent. And there is something else. The Christianity that we hear from the pulpit has nothing in its thought of a corporate pursuit of Christ. It is always you, the individual. This is what you're supposed to do. No thought of putting the work that a man has to the absolute and total ultimate acid test: community. Community is not tried in my world except for those who have tried it in extreme legalism, and there is no ministry today within the institutional church that could possibly survive the community unless it employs legalism. But that doesn't mean it's not possible.

Church history can be written, and the world can read what used to be and those who fought for a return to first-century principles. Those books had not been written, and they have certainly never been written by men outside the institutional church. Something can replace the everlasting oratorical sermon. There are better ideas and better ways to sing than with a choir. A mute congregation can be enlivened to share and share and share, and continue to share, once they have a vision of Christ and practical handles to touch Him. Seminaries can be exposed, and they can be replaced. Men will have to deal with that which ought to be, used to be, and the horrific evolution of the history of how the seminary came to be, where men will either have to compromise their conscience, or find a higher, better way, as revealed in scripture.

Community is the nightmare of every man and people who've ever tried it outside of legalism, but that doesn't mean that if they had it in the first century, we cannot have it again. Not only is community possible, but it can also be lived out in freedom. But oh, there must be someone present who has known it before to help guide God's people through both... in the words of Dante, the fearsome forest. Men who are born and raised in the freedom that can be in community can guide us through passages of both the problems and the glory of knowing one another as believers, close

and personal. I say again, the institutional church is not fit for this. It has no armor for such dealings. It will either revert to legalism or crumble. That is because it lacks a spiritual basis or any practical understanding and application of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible to have community and have joy, and yes, it will be broken from time to time with disunity.

There is nothing clearer than this very fact revealed to us in the New Testament when we look at it from one end to the other. When we see the beginnings to the end of chronology, as the story moves from year to year, that's part of the drama. That's part of the story. It's part of the heartache. It's also part of the faith in God and the joy when He sees us through. There are some things that they had in the first century going for them that none of us have today. I think, above and beyond all else, they had no options. Somewhere, it has been said that you cannot get anywhere until all options have been removed. It is hard for a Christian today to think in terms of having no option. I will come here among you, and if I don't like it, I will leave.

In the first century, there was one church in one city. The name of that church was named after that city. The church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, the church in Jerusalem, the churches in Galatia, and the church in Antioch. One church, no place to go. Traveling mostly was contained within 10 miles of where a man or woman was born. This can be narrowed down when you become a Christian who has separated himself from the traditions and the practices of the institutional church, which are so far afield as I said, they're not even in the same field. You are coming down to a small world where your options are extremely few, if not nonexistent. So we create a revelation, an environment in which God's people throughout this country and any world at any place in any world can at least know that there is such a thing as a people who have left, separated themselves, and are only the greatest pilgrimage of them all, Christians out to see an advancement in the restoration work of God.

Next, I would like you to know who it is that walks through the door. Now, this is not a criticism of anyone. This is universal. It is ingrained in us, and we must recognize it. I put it this way. I know of no denomination, nor evangelical or otherwise mindset, but what we are essentially Methodists. That is, we are centered on method. The question is, "How do you do that?" As though the answer was found in changing practices. Without even thinking about it, the first questions are, how did you change that? What's your practice? Who thought that one up? Well, that's wonderful. I've always wondered how you could solve that problem. The answer is not there. God knows we need revolutionary practices, but oh, the fire that feeds the church is Christ. The water that we drink, the drop for our spirit, is found in touching the Lord Jesus Christ. It is praying and reading your Bible, nor is it pray, pray. It is a living, breathing fellowship of you with your Lord and you with your brothers and sisters. All methods without that are but death.

How much we have tried to recreate the first-century church by nothing more than method. Practical things where the flow of the waters of Life is not known. The story was told of someone from Asia who left a nation of persecution and visited the United States. When he returned, he was asked, "What did you learn?" His answer was, "It is amazing how much people can accomplish

without the Life of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit." We are Methodists. Again, God knows we need some new methods, but we also need a revelation of Christ. With that, we have to have a heart to go through dry spells, for dry spells are of God. If you are here looking for a forever up, you have come to the wrong place, for there is much to be as much to be learned in the down as therein as in the up. And the living spirit which dwells within you cannot always be up. Oh, He can, but you can't. We live in this limited earthly and, even, fallen fleshly body, and an addiction to the ever-up of emotions will rip you to shreds and leave you in a place where there's nothing in this world that will stir your inward parts, or any story or any experience will cause you to believe in such things.

There is a valley of dry bones of those who attempt to live in the forever of emotions. Expect a miracle every day. Expect a miracle when you pray. By actual count, only five people in the Gospels and Acts are named as having performed miracles. In the epistles, even fewer. You have to ignore a large part of the New Testament in order to have a continual, forever victorious, never hindered by the world nor by the fables and follies of man; naked and in peril, owning nothing. I despaired of life, in danger of false brethren, in cold and in nakedness. Demetrius has done me great, great harm. It is a tried saying, but it's nonetheless true. Only storms and perils of the sea make a great sailor. You and I will learn more hanging from the cross than we will ever learn in the midst of a revival. These things we must know and these things we must embrace and bring to our hearts and fold them into the very depths of our souls.

So, two things I would point out to you. One of them is to realize that when we ask how the first how should be, "How do we know the Lord," and "How do we handle the cross?" Even the solving of solutions by means which others before us have discovered must never be the gods of our work for Christ, nor to be in the church. I would add those who were trying to live forever, faced with the harsh realities of life on this fallen planet; they fall farther and become more despondent, reaching emotional lows when they have craved highs. I turn to look at the past. 12 men in one center, Jerusalem. Those men went out into the highways and byways of the towns and villages of Judea, into the villages of Samaria, and into the many towns and villages of Galilee, always fed and always returning to that first center. Then came the Gentiles, and there the exquisitely beautiful church in Antioch, in one of the most heathen, godforsaken, worldly pleasure-filled, immoral, addicted cities of the world: the church, large, vibrant, overcoming and backing two men.

Then they went to a church, another, another, and another. They stayed about 5 months, came back to visit for a few days, and then left those churches for a year. Those were functioning bodies of people. Two or three things I learned from that, and one of them is that we need a center, very committed people, and broken men who live not for themselves nor for the glory they find in their imagination, where living in the drunken intoxication of that imagination sees and believes they can do anything. But always the one who lives within their imagination is the glory hog. Always in the middle of that imagination that sees it can do anything is you. The man on the stage, standing in awe of your great messages, is not the man who left Antioch and went out into Galatia. Those were broken men who loved God's people; they abandoned their very beings for the care of God's

people. Men who knew their Christ and who knew the church and the life of that church and the cruelties that take place within the body of Christ, as well as the glories. Men who knew answers because they had been students of the church of the living God. No, they were not men addicted to sermons; they were there to depart and leave a functioning people of whom Christ was their center.

God save us from the young man who comes to the church to pick up all the practices he can. A man with no love in his heart or his soul. No willingness to be a follower. Always standing in judgment of those who would instruct him. Standing in judgment of the church of which he is a part. All of that so that he might equip himself with methods and messages that could cause him to go out and become the movie star of the pulpit. I would address that man and tell you, "Sir, you can do nothing, for you cannot love God's people nor tolerate their eccentricities. And I'm telling you, their eccentricities are intolerable, and they will break your heart, and if there's one ounce of personal ambition in you, you will stumble and cry out that it can't be done." Sir, you're right, because of your egotism and your shallowness and your lack of love for God's people." If God has called you, come into the church on your knees. Come there to be a servant of all. Allow God to raise you up, and the church will rise up and call you blessed. And if you happen to be part of a church that will not back you with all the glorious ways you feel you deserve, it might be because that church knows you far better than you can ever personally know.

Now I pose the questions, the contemplation of it, and the reality of it that could bring down the Himalayan mountains. How is it possible that two men can walk into a city, heathen in nature, cruel in disposition, walking to that town where the word Christ Jesus had never once been uttered? Men and women who go into heathen temples, whose minds are filled with gods who are nothing more than jumbo men who have all sorts of grudges against humans. People who are almost to the man are illiterate or close to it. Men who have never heard of a Jew, or if they do, don't know what it means. Have never heard the word Abraham or Moses or David; cannot even grasp the concept of there being only one God with within in their town there are temples to 10, 15 or 20 gods with many altars of others; from a dead stand still, walk into that town, lead people to Jesus Christ, people still being saved right up to the day they leave, and in five months under those conditions, turn around walk out and leave for a year, and the only solution you have is to teach them the Bible. I'm sorry, sir, but does the scripture not say the word of God? Yes. That very passage speaks of the word of God, and it is stated, "which spirit is the word of God."

There was no Bible. There was no scripture. There was a synagogue...no, there was not - a gentile was not even welcome in a synagogue, and he certainly was not welcome to touch sacred vellum upon which was inscribed the Torah. There was hardly a synagogue anywhere in the empire that was willing to open that wooden box and allow anyone to even be in their presence when they read. With illiteracy at 98%, you would say teach them the book when there was no book. When Paul and Barnabas walked into that city, there was not one single line of the New Testament in existence, and the Old Testament was not accessible. But the word of God, which Spirit is the word of God? Oh, there's no question. They told the stories, but they also told of Christ; not only

the One who died and rose again, but the One who indwells those people and who was, as a body of believers, able to touch that Christ corporately. No, the secret lay not in teaching a Bible which nobody had, but in a living and dwelling Lord among a body of people, not an individual. Now, I point out one other thing, and that is, before that one year was over, all four of those Galatian churches were ripped to shreds. A legalist who came into them, telling them that they had to obey the law of Moses and undergo the cutting and the fever of the removal of the foreskin.

I have, for 55, no 60 years, been looking at the book of Galatians, attempting to extract from its passages what it was those men said to those people who were less than believers for six months. What did he say to them? What did Barnabas say to them that they would dare turn around and leave those people? So far, I can tell you this. It was Christ. It was Christ. It was Christ. The Christ before creation. The Christ who was on the earth...very little of that. The Christ who indwelled them, that Christ was in heavenly places, and the fact that they were given something that doesn't even make sense to a madman, and that is that they were all dead, and the only person living in their midst was Christ, and that whatever they did as a body of people was a physical expression of that Christ. That they were saints, they were holy ones, they were sacred ones, and that they had the righteousness of God, and that they had died on a cross in Jerusalem. These are the ravings of a madman, and that they themselves no longer lived, but Christ lived.

You know something? They did the same thing Abraham did. They believed by faith; they just went ahead and believed it. It wasn't an individual who died upon that cross, nor who now lives, and Christ lives in his stead; it was not the individual. It was a body of people who were crucified but who no longer live; it is Christ who lives in a body of people. Then somehow or another, those men showed those recently ex-heathen how to know the Lord and to live in Him by the day and by the week, by the month and by the year.

I thank God for those Judaizers who came and almost ripped those four churches to pieces, because at least it gave us a glimpse into the insight of what was being said in those days. It also established that there were people called church planters, and that those church planters had gone to Jerusalem, another center, another great church. They had come to unity, and a young, uncircumcised gentile was sitting there when that letter to Galatia was written. Then he handed it to him, and he took it and delivered it. That man knew something about the church and later became the first person Paul ever separated for the work.

These things can be. We lift our lives off the stage of the mundane, and we step into a world where there are few maps, few footprints, and reestablish the old paths, and leave for others who come after us...and they will come. Signpost, directions, a legacy, for them to follow upon which they can advance. Now, we pause to observe something most people have not, and we all observe it now. We hold our breath, perhaps even sigh with anticipation, as we watch two men walk into a city, establish a church, and leave it after five or six months, then be gone for a year. But remember that during that year, there was put upon those four churches that which could destroy any church existing today. And so, we put up a signpost, and this is how it reads: "In every case of every

church which is established in the first century after the apostles left, there was one or a number of people who sought to change that church from being what it was.”

And oh, the gift of the power of negation, the negative we are told is nine times more powerful than the positive, and in every case, there was an effort to change what those men had done. And now we live in an age of options, and we live in a world of endless choruses of voices. Let it be said and said again: in Galatia, a group of delegates came in there strong with twisted words, to either make those churches into Judaizers or proselytes or destroy them and certainly cause every person there to question Paul Tarsus. Those words can destroy a man, destroy a ministry, destroy a work.

In Thessalonica, why work? Jesus is coming, a reinterpretation of Paul's words. The church does not know whether to work or not. People being put upon by the lazy who showed up at my times praising Jesus. By the way, their tribe is not dead. In Corinth, four voices crying out: it's Greek oration, no, it's Jewish miracles. No, it's Jesus. No, it's Paul. The church is on the verge of disaster. Get ready for it. It will come. The day you begin to hear those voices, walk back into the Garden of Eden, and listen to those negators, open your eyes and see just how bad the church is you belong to. Or how far greater would the church be, if those who have seen visions, and who have the discernment to see other men's faults, would but lead you in their stead? There are always the voices that change the direction, meaning, and interpretation of the church. There's one thing I would like to tell you. Look at their lives. Not how wise they are, but what they have done and what they have been through in comparison to those men who fought and bled and died to the cross and to their own selves. Always compare, compare pound for pound, day for day, work for work, week by week, week for week, and year for year. Just how much have they done, and with what success? Restore. Restore also means to suffer. It also means using the wisdom of God to discern the events that surround you.

The church in Philippi, read it. Church in Colossae, read it. A Church established in Rome, meeting in Priscilla's house, read it. Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome, and Corinth. Forever for the reinterpretation by lesser men with greater visions. I would like to say this, and I have observed it after 50 years in the church; they've got a better gospel. Step back and look at them because it all sounds so reasonable and so much better, and ask yourself one thing. “Can they live under the pressure that this job calls for?” If they respond, “It's not necessary if we just all love one another.” Do the critics have a background and a backbone to do what was called upon Paul and Barnabas and the others to live? You'll never have the church if you ever have lesser men than they. Perhaps a Prem Pradhan, who had his scars to show. They have not yet been shot at, killed, or wounded, but if they are still alive, they have the scars of nails deep within them, and they have laid down their lives for God's people.

Now, if you think these are unnecessary, then close the book that tells these tales and take off from your shelf the one that takes up where that book leaves off. Pick up a book that tells the story of church history. The radicals, the extreme reformers, the iconoclasts, the dissenters, and see if you

can see any change in the story. Attacks, twisting words, and always the cry from governments without, from churches, traditional churches from without, and voices within, crying out...the criticism of the governments and the religions: *You should not exist*. And cries from within: we can do better. We can do better. Just come follow us. When you eat thereof, you shall not die. Your eyes, let them be open and see that I have a better idea.

I wish that every Christian who comes among people who are giving it all to restore would make a simple promise. If you don't like it here, leave without taking anyone with you, and please don't slam the door. Gently walk off all alone, not one disciple is allowed to follow you, and go out there and build that church of which you have so great a vision, but of which you cannot raise up without first stealing someone else's foundation.

A young man who came among us...he'd been sent by some other group for the purpose of destroying us. He joined in with all of the young people, and so help me, he led every one of them out. I don't really know what happened to those people. It was done quickly, and I hardly even got to meet the young people who had just arrived. Just before he left, I said, I think I've got this right. I told him, "Sir, if you had never been born, young man, would these people be leaving here right now?" And he said, very quickly, "Yes, because I have opened their eyes." He couldn't have opened their eyes if he had never been born. If you had never been born, would there have been this split? Of course, there would, because they have seen how bad this situation is. What have they seen? They've seen a church less perfect than you are.

Are you prepared to know that there is glory in restoration? But there is also sometimes nothing less than gore, always at the hands of a voice that says, "Open your eyes, and I can show you something better." There is no man of God who has ever been recorded in church history among the radicals and the dissidents who built on another man's foundation. Those two-fisted men went out and did it all on their own. Two books that tell the same story, and despite all idealism, will not change.

(Continued in Part 2)