

Churches of Christ --- Then and Now
Lesson 3 – Should We Seek to Restore the Ancient Order?

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Introduction: Is the concept of “restoration of the ancient order” valid?

- A. As the Bible became readily available to the public, many began to see the need for the “restoration of the ancient order.” God has always given this call. **(Jer 6:14-17)**
 - 1. In the midst of religious confusion this appeared as a valid stand.
 - 2. Two things had to be true for restoration to be valid. First, there had to be a complete plan (blueprint). Secondly, there should be no additions or alterations to the plan.
 - 3. This simple approach to the Bible brought forth a group of people broadly labeled as the “restoration movement.”
- B. There have been those who took this stand later to see their descendants reject it.
 - 1. Today there have been numerous books published by ACU and others rejecting the concept of “restoration.” They want a “unity movement” and not a “restoration movement.”
 - 2. Let us simply examine the scriptures and see what our Lord Jesus would have us to do! We will also include reviews of some recently published books.

I. How should we handle the revealed words of God?

- A. Jesus taught that the Old Testament was the very words of God!
 - 1. He claimed the writers were moved by the Holy Spirit. **(Mark 12:36)**
 - 2. He claimed the word of God is without contradiction. **(John 10:34-35)**
 - 3. Man was to live by every word from God! **(Matt 4:4, 7, 10)**
- B. Jesus showed how God’s words are to be respected.
 - 1. Jesus would only do those things that He saw the Father do. **(Jn 5:19-20, 30)**
 - 2. Jesus wanted His followers to understand authority and to follow the Father just like He did. **(Jn 7:16-17)**
 - 3. The respect for the words of God would lead Jesus only to act when the Father gives Him instruction. This stand would lead Jesus to the cross and us to be free from sin! **(Jn 8:28-32)**
 - 4. Jesus showed how we must empty ourselves and follow Him. When we do as Jesus did then we will honor the Father. **(Jn 12:25-28)**
 - 5. Jesus disciples will be characterized by the willingness to abide only in what is authorized by His words. **(Jn 12:48-50)**
 - 6. Whatever form God gives his word (historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, epistle) it is the very words of God and thus authoritative!
- C. It is these attitudes towards the words of God (authority) that Jesus proclaimed would be taught after He was raised from the dead. **(Mt 28:18-20)**
 - 1. When men are converted to Christ the rest of their lives as disciples are indented by this attitude.
 - 2. We take what God has revealed and we only teach and practice what we are given. **(1 Pt 4:11)**
 - 3. If it is not given by God, it is not to be taught or practiced! **(1 Tim 1:3-4)**

II. Can we “infer laws” from historical narrative?

- A. The significance of the first day of the week is found in the apostle’s teachings.
(Acts 2:41-42)
1. We will learn from historical narrative, epistle and the life of Christ.
 2. We will see the example of the apostles and their instructions. **(1 Cor 11:1; 14:37)**
- B. Jesus was raised on the first day of the week.
1. Sunday was the completion of “three days and three nights!” **(Mt 12:40; 26:61)**
 2. The scriptures are very specific on this. **(Mt 28:1-4)**
 3. The early church did not keep the Sabbath, but the 1st day of the week was their time to assemble.
- C. The church was established on the first day of the week.
1. Jesus wanted a strong anticipation of this in His disciples. **(Mk 9:1)**
 2. He gave very specific instructions concerning their waiting in Jerusalem.
(Lk 24:46-49; Acts 1:4-8)
 3. These things were fulfilled in the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ!
 4. The baptism of Christ was first preached on this day! **(Acts 2:38-39)**
 5. Pentecost always occurs on the first day of the week. **(Lev 23:15-16)**
- D. Churches were to take up a collection on the first day of the week.
1. Paul gave great emphasis to this day when he instructed Corinth and other churches concerning a specific contribution. **(1 Cor 16:1-3)**
 2. The NASV properly gives the emphasis of the Greek text.
1 Corinthians 16:2 (NASB) ²On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.
 3. This necessitates action surrounding the assembly so that no collections be made when Paul comes.
- E. The Lord’s supper was observed on the first day of the week.
1. The apostles instructed Christians to be steadfast in this. **(Acts 2:42)**
 2. The term “breaking of bread” can describe the Lord’s supper. **(1 Cor 10:15-17)**
 - a. It was to be partaken in the assembly by the whole church.
(1 Cor 11:20-22)
 - b. There is great spiritual significance attached to this feast! **(1 Cor 5:8)**
 3. There are some verses where the “breaking of bread” describes a common meal.
(Acts 2:46; Acts 20:11)
 - a. When this is done in homes rather than the assembly.
 - b. When only one individual is described rather than an assembly.
 4. The early Christians partook of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week.
(Acts 20:6-7)
- F. Are we making human laws from historical narrative?
1. Paul so noted that his writings to Corinth contained the will of God that all churches were to obey. **(1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33-37)**
 2. In both the contribution and the Lord’s Supper, those who respect the scriptures as Jesus did have a clear path to follow.

III. New views on authority among churches of Christ

A. Some are boldly claiming we do not need authority to act. Many are attributing this approach as coming from men:

“Not surprisingly, our historic legalism has created legalistic hermeneutics within the Churches of Christ. Thus, before we read the first word of Scripture, we have already brought certain false presuppositions to the process. For example, traditionally, we in the Churches of Christ have looked at the Scriptures to tell what is authorized. But before we look at the Scriptures, we decide that the question is one of authority. But, you see, the Scriptures not only tell us the answer, they tell us the questions, and authority is not one of the questions addressed by the New Testament. It is, however, a doctrine invented by John Calvin and still taught by strict Calvinists. You see, the Campbell’s and Stone were strict Calvinists by education, and although they rejected the Calvinistic view of salvation, they did continue in the mainstream of Calvinistic hermeneutical thought.” – **Jay Gwin, “Do We Teach Another Gospel?”**

1. Not surprisingly brother Gwin includes within his description of “legalist” those who oppose instrumental music in worship. How can we know “if it is from God or from men?”
 2. How many who hold this position will fairly discuss it? Attitudes reveal hearts.
- B. Sadly, many preachers within churches of Christ will not be so bold. They will use other language that the hearer cannot understand.

1. **“Patternist”** - “It is time to admit that in our churches, a wide variety of people from all walks of life...simply do not find patternism and legalism to be meaningful themes” (p. 121). - Dr. Richard Hughes, “Reclaiming a Heritage; Reflections on the Heart, Soul and Future of Churches of Christ.”
 - a. Biblically the term pattern is equivalent to authority! (**Heb 8:5**)
 - b. Is it legalism to take “every word” that come from God on a subject and properly apply it and stay within what is revealed? (**Mt 3:4**)
 - c. If it is a matter of misapplied scripture then show where that is done!
2. **“Propositional Baconian”** - What has become sad is that current day CENIist deny the origins of their logician hermeneutic. D. R. Dungan gladly praised the origins of his hermeneutical method and quoted Bacon in his book on hermeneutics.

Dungan wrote, "... Bacon, to whom we are largely, if not wholly, indebted for this method of philosophy" (p. 82).

According to Dungan, the purpose of the inductive method is to report all the facts, "and from them the conclusion is to be reached" (p. 83). – **Discussion with a Christian Church Preacher**

- a. This kind of reasoning from scripture existed long before Francis Bacon.
 - b. What doctrine does not involve logic and application? (**Jn 7:17**)
3. **“CENI Hermeneutic”** - Why does CENI consistently distort narratives, poetry, parables, doxologies, psalms, wisdom, personal correspondence, beatitudes, etc. into one monotonous invective? Why would any conscientious "common sense" Christian allow such distortions to go unchallenged? – **Discussion with a Christian Church Preacher**

Pattern puzzle pieces come in three shapes, according to Church of Christ pattern-seekers. Each piece bears the form either of an express command ("C"), an approved example ("E"), or a necessary inference ("NI"). But the picture on the completed puzzle is surrounded on four sides with a very thick border. According to the pattern-seekers, this means that every detail of church structure, worship, leadership, and ministry must be "authorized" by one of those puzzle pieces, or else it is unlawful. By their reckoning, silence does not mean consent. It means absolute prohibition ("S"). We will refer to this doctrinal system as "CENI-S," an abbreviation for "command, example, necessary inference" and "silence." –

Ed Fudge, the Plague of Patternism

- a. CENI is a description of language. It is like noun, verb and pronoun!
Why object to these things?
- b. Does the Bible approve of following examples and drawing inferences?
(1 Cor 11:1; Mk 12:23-27)

4. **“We should read the Bible as a narrative.”** – or **“We should only preach expository sermons.”** – “treat the Bible as a narrative that tells the story of God’s mighty deeds on behalf of the world which he created, which he seeks to redeem and over which he someday will triumph when his rule is complete” (p. 186). **Richard Hughes, “Reclaiming a Heritage**

“I believe we should go back to the Bible – free of any shackles of doctrinal issues of churches of Christ – and just read it as a story (which is what it is). Not seeking to find justification or argumentation over some preconceived notion about righteousness, holiness, patterns, etc. But, reading it as a Christological document (see the Art of Reading Scripture), I think we will be greatly enriched and many of our rigid rules will become more nuanced and refreshed. We may even drop some rules; and we may actually add some depth of commitment to the call to discipleship. As we do that, and as we begin to glean the true intent of this story and reinvestigate the real meaning of various contexts that have dominated us – in our issues – we will have done ourselves a great favor. We will not be propositional Baconians – nor will we be relativist postmoderns (though, to one degree or another, we will miss some points and probably lean in one or both of those directions at different times in specific instances). But, we will be Bible storytellers.” – From a preacher in a “non-institutional church”

- a. I recently hear a preacher in Auburn say that he would only emphasize the subjects that come from expository preaching.
- b. He likely will refuse to make applications to present day issues that flow from a study of scripture. I doubt he would oppose instrumental music because that issue is not specifically debated in scripture.
- c. Reading without personal application is vain! **(Heb 5:12-14)**

Questions to Consider:

1. What is meant when someone says that “we need to restore the 1st century church?”
2. What did Jesus do when He neither saw the Father act or receive positive teaching from the Father to act? What did Jesus say was the fruits from this kind of attitude towards God’s words?

3. Did God give a command to observe the Lord's Supper on the 1st day of the week? Does God require Christians to observe the Lord's Supper on the 1st day of every week? Explain.
4. If we are free to act when God is silent then how will that impact local churches?
5. Why do some criticize "the hermeneutic of CENI?" Is this criticism honest? Explain

A Review of Reclaiming a Heritage

by John Waddey

Dr. Richard Hughes of Pepperdine University has given us, "Reclaiming a Heritage; Reflections on the Heart, Soul and Future of Churches of Christ. The book is published by Abilene Christian University Press. Bro. Hughes was raised in the Church of Christ and continues to claim membership in it (p. 118), but after reading his book one can't help but wonder, for how long?

From Bro. Hughes perspective, "Churches of Christ are suffering a severe identity crisis" (p. 121). Those acquainted with our brotherhood know it is not the conservative element among us, but the liberals of the change movement who suffer from this identity crisis. They don't know who they are or where they are going. They only know that they no longer wish to be part of "restoring the faith and practice of the early church."

He tells us, "It is time to admit that in our churches, a wide variety of people from all walks of life...simply do not find patternism and legalism to be meaningful themes" (p. 121). By patternism he means the conviction that we should be obedient to the commands, restrictions and regulations of the Bible. He along with all other change agents flatly rejects that concept. There is a legalism that is a perversion of Christianity, but he has in mind the sense that man should be obedient to the written word of Christ! We freely admit that those of the change "fellowship" fit this category.

He suggests, "For many in our churches today, the restoration vision is a dead-end street, an essentially useless category" (p. 121). Understand this and you will understand what change agents are saying and why. This loss of faith in our restoration vision is clearly demonstrated in the flow of materials being issued by men associated with Abilene Christian and Pepperdine University.

He declares, "And so we are left with no useful past, no clear identity, and no meaningful legacy. Essentially we are spiritual orphans" (p. 122). This sad passage reveals the bankruptcy of the change movement. Those of us who look to Christ as the head and founder of the church; to his word as the divine standard of our faith, have no such disillusionment.

He asserts, "Many feel...that the restoration ideal has spawned arrogance and division and little else" (p. 67). Our movement spawned Abilene Christian University, Pepperdine University (where the professor has taught) and a dozen other schools. It spread the gospel message around the world into some 110 nations. It grew from 189,000 in 1906 to some 1,350,000 here at home and as many more overseas. Its members have established and sustained a dozen benevolent homes, scores of Christian primary and secondary schools. They have pumped millions of dollars into relief for the poor and victims of tragedies.

They have established and sustained campus ministries on scores of college and university campuses. Her members have written and published hundreds of books and journals including quality commentaries and Bible Translations. Her ministers are generally well-educated and her members are generally middle class. On the whole, her meeting places are modern and comfortable although not usually lavish. She has carried on an extensive outreach by radio, television, newspaper and the Internet. This is the church that Hughes thinks has spawned little else than arrogance and division..

Professor Hughes' problem is revealed on p. 59. "It was not until the late 1960s that I found myself disillusioned with certain aspects of my heritage." Now he is disillusioned with most of it. But he finds much to admire in other religious bodies who hold more liberal views.

It is revealing to consider his view of Churches of Christ, of which is a part. His career has been spent teaching in schools founded and sustain by members of this church, hence from them he has drawn his sustenance. "Within a few short years, some had essentially abandoned the search for truth...They elevated their rejection of creeds to the status of a creedal statement...for all practical purpose, these people had turned their backs on the genius of their own tradition" (p. 34).

He paints an accurate picture of a contemporary "change congregation:" "restorationist churches constitute a perpetual feeder for the evangelical establishment. This is a way of saying that authentically restorationist churches are by definition sectarian. As they move toward denominational status, however, they almost invariably move into the orbit of evangelical Christianity" (p. 111). "There is, perhaps no better example of the transition from restorationist sect to evangelical denomination than the Churches of Christ..." (p.112). He should qualify this by saying, "Churches of Christ of the change movement!"

He identifies the belief that drives the change agents, it is a "newfound theology of grace" (p. 132).

This book is a vivid example of postmodern thinking. This worldly philosophy argues that truth is unattainable; that all things are relative and there are no moral and spiritual absolutes. He tells us, "Our fathers argued that no human being can capture the truth, possess the truth, codify the truth, preserve the truth, dispense the truth, or guard the truth." "Instead, each of us much search for truth, and that search is a search that is never completely finished" (p. 30). Of course he offers no documentation for this outlandish assertion. It does however tell us much about the author.

He reasons that the goal of restoration is, "that every Christian must return to the biblical text time and time again, constantly rethinking his /her beliefs and opinions in the light of God's holy word" (p. 34). What he wants to convey is that we cannot be certain of our understanding of baptism, the nature of the church, the role of women in leadership, the question of instrumental music in worship, etc. I would ask him if he is sure about such doctrines as monotheism, the deity of Christ, the reality of heaven, salvation by grace? How can he be sure of his faith? Does he have to keep searching?

He labors long and hard to convince us we cannot understand God's revelation sufficiently to say, "this is that" which the prophets spoke (**Acts 2:16**). Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth" (**John 8:32**), but Dr. Hughes says we cannot know the truth. But then Jesus did not have his doctorate, did he? Hughes tell us that God "refuses to be confined by words, even biblical words; and therefore shatters every formula, every definition, every pattern, every plan, every form of orthodoxy..." (p. 46). By his doctrine, he has no pattern, no standard, no sure way of knowing God's will for how to serve him; only a blind leap of subjective "faith" and the wistful hope that God will have mercy on him! He assures us, "As envisioned by the founders of our movement, this ecumenical thrust never depended on the ability of human beings to arrive at the truth or to agree on a set of theological propositions..." (p. 31). Thus I suppose we should embrace in fellowship everyone who claims to be a Christian, all of whom are hopelessly searching for illusive truth.

He repeatedly implies that members of Churches of Christ, other than his circle of change agents, pretend to be infallible and absolute masters of all of God's truth. Yet in 47 years of preaching among our people I have yet to encounter even one who so claimed.

The author tells us "the dominant theme of Churches of Christ in our early years was our commitment to the conviction, that 'God is God and all human beings are fallible.'" (p. 35). He oft repeats this profound theological and philosophical truth but he offers no documentation to sustain it. Can he find anywhere, at any time a leader among our brethren who did not in fact recognize God alone as God and all human beings as fallible? Just one! He finally gets around to saying, "Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone seldom made direct and explicit statements to that effect, but they pointed unmistakably to their convictions in that regard..." (p. 53). Where? This airy statement bears the musty smell of the seminary and most likely had its origin in the lectures or writings of some denominational professor. It is profound but meaningless for the discussion at hand.

Change agents like Hughes delight in finding some ill-conceived, ill-stated line by a brother and then asserting that such dribble is representative of all conservative men...those not of his tribe. He delights in setting the extreme views of prominent men against the general consensus of other mature brethren. This he does with David Lipscomb's views on Civil Government and Barton Stone's views on Premillennialism. He fails to note that David Lipscomb fought the change agents of his generation hook and claw until he grew too old to do so.

Dr. Hughes goals are easily identified.

He wants to convince us that we are in fact a denomination and should not claim otherwise (p.51-52).

He wants to convince us that Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone were the "founders of our tradition" (p. 48).

That the founding generation expressed no interest in restoring the “true Church of Christ” (p. 37).

It is too bad that those first generation restoration preachers did not understand this. They would not have worked so hard to win members of sectarian bodies to the church they served.

Along with other change agents he wants us to “treat the Bible as a narrative that tells the story of God’s mighty deeds on behalf of the world which he created, which he seeks to redeem and over which he someday will triumph when his rule is complete” (p. 186). He should tell us if there are any commandments to be obeyed? If so, which? Perhaps he would explain those two reference which speak of God’s word as a pattern and tell us why they do not mean what they say **(II Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5)**.

To Dr. Hughes the defeat of premillennialism in our ranks was unfortunate.

“The destruction of the apocalyptic vision (includes premillennialism) severely weakened both the restoration vision and the counter cultural dimensions of Churches of Christ ...” (p. 116). If he feels that a belief in premillennialism is so important, he could find it by transferring his membership to the Independent Baptists.

He wants us to accept women in leadership roles in the church. He describes God’s limitation on women in church leadership as “subjugation of women” (p. 89). He would negate the plainly stated restrictions on **women (I Cor. 14:33-34; I Tim. 2:11-12)** by citing Paul’s words, “There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ” **(Gal. 3:26-29)**. The fact is that God did not in some other verse place limitation on people regarding ethnicity or social status as he did on gender!

He labors hard to convince his readers that the best minds among us have always believed that one could be a faithful Christian while an active member of a human denomination. No doubt a few exceptions could be found, but the overwhelming majority of our brethren have not thought or said such. Only with the advent of the change movement has such become widespread.

Like other liberals in the social, political and religious realm, Dr. Hughes wants the church to involve itself in their social agenda. He frequently mentions our failure to respond to the issues of poverty, racism and war (p. 87), and “the subjugation of women” (p. 89). “Why Churches of Christ took so little interest in social ethics. Why, for example were we so reluctant to see the implications the gospel holds for large-scale issues of peace and justice? (The anti-war movement of the 60’s and the Civil Rights Movement, JHW). Why were we so reluctant to confront the issue of racial segregation...why did Churches of Christ take so little interest in the great moral issues that convulsed the country during the turbulent years of the 1960s?” (p. 58). He faults brethren because “they sometimes cast their lot with the forces of law and order that sought to subdue the voices of dissent” (p. 61). “Almost never did white, mainstream Churches of Christ support the great swelling movement on behalf of peace and justice that captured the minds of so many Americans...” (p. 61). As a true liberal he cannot

imagine an intelligent person not agreeing with his agenda. He cannot understand that many of us preferred law and order to those motley crowds of anarchists rioting in our cities. Nor can he understand how Christians could work within the church to change sinful attitudes about race without joining the Civil Rights political movement. Dr. Hughes faults today's church for the failures of past generation in dealing with slavery (1810-1865) and segregation. In this he follows the example of the social and political liberals. They cannot concede the progress made because they spend their time dwelling on the failures of the past. We do not deny the failures of past generations, but we recognize the great progress that has occurred. He constantly labors to paint "white mainstream" churches of Christ as molded and shaped by their culture. I would ask him if black Christians and churches are shaped by their culture? Are the academic communities at ACU and Pepperdine U molded and shaped by their culture?

One of the few useful things in this book is Dr. Hughes portrait of the liberal change element that has arisen to prominence among us. Note the characteristics of these people:

They worked to "enhance their colleges by appealing to the budgets of local congregations through a variety of promotional strategies, through increasingly complex institutional structures, and through a vast building campaign, aimed at giving Churches of Christ more viability in the affluent and 'respectable parts of town.'"

"Following the 1960s, other developments suggested the Churches of Christ (make that liberal congregations and preachers) were rapidly turning their backs on their Restorationist heritage and moving into the evangelical orbit."

The distinctly evangelical theme of justification by grace through faith" became the norm in their preaching.

"A therapeutic gospel, coupled with an emphasis on 'family values'...dominated many Church of Christ pulpits."

"Worship sometimes verged on entertainment."

"And many urban Churches adopted 'church growth' strategies that had more in common with the Willow Creek Church (Independent Protestant Denomination in Illinois JHW) than with that traditional heritage" (p. 117).

Change agents like Dr. Hughes like to talk about radical faith, discipleship and commitment, but observation reveals it is radical liberalism, not God's ways they are calling us to. Bro. Hughes is a man he describes as "swallowed by one strain...of the popular religious culture that dominates much of American Christianity today" (p. 133). He is immersed in postmodernism, a thorough going liberal, who is trying to reshape our people after his own philosophical image. I feel sorry for this brother. His much learning and his academic environment have poisoned his heart against the church of his parents and his early life. They have filled him with a spiteful arrogance towards it and his fellow-Christians. He really needs to break out of this church which he holds in such low esteem and migrate to one whose social agenda is more attuned to his; perhaps the United Methodist

or the Episcopal church. His book is pure poison, it would have been far better had it been stillborn.