

"Restoring Christianity"

When things are broken, we want to fix them. Well, what happens when what is broken is what we believe and practice? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God gave us His words and He gave them to Jesus, who gave those words to us for all time. His words contain instructions, encouragements, warnings, and promises. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24 and verse 35 that, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." They are here once for all time. And Peter echoes that promise, declaring that "the word of Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1 and verse 25). Now if the word of God is eternal, then it speaks authoritatively to us today just as it always has. We must listen and follow it. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

The Lord Jesus is in the saving and the restoring business. He purifies broken and sinful souls. He said in Luke 5 verses 31 and 2, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Jesus walked the earth and He died on the cross, and His goal was the same. He told Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." When people go astray, the Lord, like a shepherd, seeks them so He can save them from the dangers of sin.

He also corrects those that are headed in the wrong way and leads them to everlasting life. The Lord grants to all the gift of repentance and reconciliation, which restores a right relationship. The Lord warns and corrects by His word, the Bible, those who follow false beliefs or practices so that they can leave the error and come to the truth. The concept of restoration is neither impossible nor misguided, for the Lord is in the restoring business.

We offer this study on restoring Christianity free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Jude verses 3 and 4, and then we'll explore why we should follow the Lord in our faith and practice.

Our scripture reading today comes from the epistle of Jude verses 3 and 4. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

The faith was once for all time delivered to the saints. And in fact John 16 verse 12 and 13 point out that the Holy Spirit was to guide the apostles into all the truth. Peter makes it clear to us in 2 Peter 1 and verse 3 that we have all things that pertain to life and godliness through a knowledge of Him whose called us to His own glory and virtue. Yes faith was once for all time delivered to the saints. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful for Your word and for what it teaches us. We're thankful Father that long ago You gave it to us. Help us to be faithful to the things that You have taught us. In Jesus' name, Amen

The New Testament teaches that Christians are to hold to the traditions, forms and patterns that were delivered to them by the apostles. These traditions, unlike human traditions, come from God and they reveal what He wills for Christians. Paul praised the Corinthians for following the traditions that he taught them in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 1 and 2. He said, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." Paul encouraged the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 2 and verse 15 to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us."

Now these inspired instructions, traditions, gave the early Christians forms or patterns to follow. Whether in the matter of salvation or in worship, they were encouraged to obey from their hearts. Romans 6 verses 17 to 18 says, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Now when the Romans "became obedient from the heart to that form (or pattern) of teaching to which they were committed," God freed them from sin and made them His servants.

Again Paul spoke broadly to Timothy of many things. In 2 Tim. 1 and verse 13 when he said, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus," Now to suggest that there are no patterns to follow is to deny what the Lord commands and what faithful Christians did. Now if the sun, the planets, and the moon in our universe follow a pattern, if every cell in our body has a DNA pattern, and if every leaf on every tree follows a pattern, why would we suppose that the Lord's church has no pattern?

The restoration movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in America believed in the need to unite those who follow Christ. They saw the fighting and discord among Christians in the early days of this country and they wanted unity. They wanted to follow the prayer of Jesus in John 17 verses 20 to 23: where He said "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

There can be no doubt that weak and fallible men have often allowed misguided zeal and wrongheaded attitudes to get in the way of true obedience and unity; but this doesn't mean that we ought to stop following the Lord's teaching. The apostle Peter frequently blundered, but he was serious about his devotion to the Lord and he repented of any evil. He put away his blunders and continued serving faithfully. Peter knew false teaching would come along, that untaught and unstable men would distort the truth. And so he said in 2 Peter 3 verses 17 to 18, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Now unity comes from the things that unify. Before Jesus prayed for unity, he prayed that His disciples would be "sanctified (that is set apart) in the truth" (John 17 and verse 17). The idea that people should discard the Lord's teaching about salvation and the church in order to be united with others who believe differently will never bring the kind of unity for which Jesus prayed. Instead, it settles for a union with error. Instead of teaching one faith and one gospel, compromise corrupts the

church and the truth by blending it with modern culture. To hold to the truth, we cannot compromise but must separate from those who are in error.

Someone has correctly said, "It is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error. It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It is not love and it is not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie." Though we live in a time that demands political correctness, God expects us to be obedient to His word. God's word says in Romans 12 and verse 2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Restoring is not the same as reforming. Now reforming suggests a makeover that improves the existing system. Restoring, however, suggests the idea of bringing something back to an earlier and better condition. And much of what passes for Christianity today has little likeness to the ideals that are found in the New Testament that Jesus expected of the church in all ages. Now some churches have become social organization; and others have become enterprises, while still others have become an entertainment venue. Many churches have forgotten the way of the Lord and they have pursued whatever culture dictates. Some have so divorced themselves from the truth found in Scripture, found in the Bible, that they believe almost anything. I can understand why many find religion distasteful these days.

When we suggest a need for restoring the church, we're saying something is wrong and needs to be corrected. The restoration principle points to the inspired and desired will of God for all congregations found in the teaching of the New Testament. Even when the New Testament honestly criticizes a congregation, one can learn from the criticism what God does not approve. God speaks to real life and real problems in the New Testament in order that Christians and congregations in later days may not repeat the same mistake.

Jesus walks among His churches and will judge them on the last day by His teaching, His word is that teaching (John 12 and verse 48). Now since the word of the Lord is authoritative to the very last day, the same standard will be applied to all. He doesn't have one Bible for one group and a different Bible for other groups. God expects those who follow Him in every age to do His will, not to invent their own churches. When a group strays from the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, and establishes their own religious group, that's unlike what you read about, and they do it after their own desires, well, they're not following the will of God. Religious people can easily assume that their practices are biblical, when they're not. Jack Lewis noted in his book *Basic Beliefs*, that, "Every generation will either be driven by cultural pressures or directed by God's word. It does no good to be admired by our culture only to be rejected by God."

What should a church do if it strays from the will of God? Well the answer is simple: repent! That is what Jesus said to the seven churches of Asia when they got away from it. Repentance is a turning away from the worldly the evil, and the human and turning toward the way of the Lord. Now some sins are moral matters; but others are doctrinal, that is what men teach. To be restored, people should turn away from doctrinal error to the will of God. Restoration takes place when people repent, and this is necessary to please God. To argue restoration is to argue against, that is, is to argue against repentance.

Now no one can remain in error and still please God. In the early church, false teachers said that Jesus didn't come in the flesh. Well, John said in 2 John 9 to 11 that, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; (and) the one who abides in the teaching,

he has both the Father and the Son." Now God expects us to give up false teaching and abide in the teaching of Christ in order to "have God." These false teachers were lying about Jesus and guilty of evil deeds. What do you do when you find out that you've been deceived, or are in error? Well, you correct the situation. You abandon the false doctrine or the false practice and you come back to God's will and God's way of doing things. Now this is what one does to restore his relationship with God—he repents.

Jack Lewis, remarked, "Almost every religious revival that has taken place in the history of the church (and in Israel's history too) has been sparked by a return to the basic fundamentals of God's word. We must never lose sight of the fact that the power behind significant religious change is the living, active word of God (Hebrews 4 and verse 12). Not dynamic preachers, not charismatic leaders, not cleverly written books, not new evangelistic gimmicks, not community-changing service projects. No the power of the word, that is in the word of God resets wandering priorities, puts to death consumer-driven passions, and it recalibrates out values to God's eternal standards."

Now King Hezekiah led Judah to repent of evil. Hezekiah followed an evil king who led Judah into idolatry. He wanted to bring Israel back to the way of God. 2 Kings 18 verses 3 to 7 says that, "He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and (he) broke down the sacred pillars and (he) cut down the Asherah. (And) He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. (Well) He trusted in the LORD, (Hezekiah did) 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. And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered."

Likewise, King Josiah led Judah to repent at a later time. 2 Kings 22 verses 10 and 11 says, "Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes." Josiah 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."

So Josiah called all Judah together and "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" and that's from 2 Kings 23 verses 2 and 3. Josiah destroyed everything idolatrous and evil. And Josiah's example of repentance restored Judah to God's teaching. Oh, if we find that we're in error, let's do the same thing!

The Bible is the complete and final authority. Just as a seed will produce only after its own kind, so the seed of God's word will produce the same Christianity today that it did in the first century (Luke 8 and verse 11). I tell you the Word of God works today the same way it did when the Lord gave it in the first century. And so the work of restoration, then, is actually soul-winning, since it leads a lost soul out of sinful error into God's saving grace. Let's pray together. Oh, Father help us always to come back to You to do Your will and to leave the error of this world. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Imagine that you're driving and come upon an automobile accident. And you find a man there who is injured; his leg is grievously broken. He's in great agony and he's crying for help. And so you

immediately call 9-1-1, and an Emergency Medical Team arrives soon. Well, the man tells the technician, "Give me something to deaden the pain! Just knock me out!" Well, surely he'll give him something to ease the pain; but he won't stop there. He will also set the leg so that it can heal. Now if the leg is not set back into place, the man's leg will not heal. That may require surgery. And the problem must be corrected, if the man is to be whole and healthy.

As the great physician, Jesus brings healing to our lives by correcting the morally broken doctrinally places in our lives and in our churches. He eases the pain through forgiveness but corrects the life through repentance. Repentance means getting our hearts and lives right. God's gracious forgiveness is abundant, but it works with repentance not apart from it. It takes both grace and repentance for people to transform and to be like Christ.

Becoming a Christian includes both our salvation and our commitment to follow Christ and be united with Him. Being united with Christ takes place when we follow that form of the death, burial, and resurrection. When we have repented and confessed our faith in Christ Jesus, we need to be baptized. Romans 6:4 to 7 says, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Now when we're baptized into Christ, we're united with Him in His death and resurrection. And it's at that time God washes away our sins and makes us His child. Oh, don't wait to be united with Christ!

Well, we hope that today's study about restoration has stirred you to want to be more like Christ. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. You can also download lessons or a newsletter at: www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just go to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry" and subscribe. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area on our website. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.