

## UNDERSTANDING RESTORATION

### INTRODUCTION

- “restore,” to bring back to the original or former state.
  - “restoration,” the return of something to a former or original state. Also, “Restoration.”
  - “restorationism,” a Christian movement seeking to restore the beliefs and practices of the early church. Also, “Restorationism.”
  - “restorationist,” a person who promotes or is an adherent of restorationism. Also, “Restorationist.”
  - Understand: the study of “Restorationism,” is not mainly a hobby of balding, aging, oldsters!
  - A bold statement: Restorationism is the mandate of the Scriptures, a requisite feature of the active Christian.
- [ - When “-ism” is added, all things that pertain to the meaning, action, and person of Restoration is added. The use of “-ism”: commonly has a negative connotation. However, the dictionary gives six usages, only two of which are negative: (1) a basis of prejudice, or a discrimination, e.g. racism, denominationalism, (2) some pathological condition, e.g. alcoholism, botulism. The positive uses of “-ism” include (1) an action or result, e.g. baptism, organism, (2) state or a quality, e.g. heroism, (3) a positive characteristic, e.g. Canadianism, (4) a system, principle, or ideological movement, e.g. conservatism, Restorationism. The suffix comes into the English language via Fr., “-isme,” Lt. “-ismus,” Gk., “-ismos,” cf. “-idzo, -adzo” verbs, having the meaning of “to do,” “to be.” Hence, “Restorationism,” all things that pertain to the meaning and action of “Restoration.” ]

### “RESTORATIONISM,” A CENTRAL BIBLICAL THEME

- “Restoring” with “restoration” is a central Biblical theme. The NIV has
  - “Restoration” 1 x
  - “Restore” 61 xs
  - “Restores” 4 xs
  - “Restored” 39 xs
  - “Restorer” 1 x or 105 xs in total.
- Bible Study. Naturally, some of these usages include rebuilding, recovery of position, return from illness. The greater usage, however, has to do with the reinstatement of a previous privilege position before God, e.g. Psa. 14:7: “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord *restores* the fortunes of his people.” In its predominant usage, it is God who does the restoring, e.g. Lam. 5:21: “*Restore* us to yourself, O Lord, that we may *be restored!* Renew our days as of old...” Yet, the people will also participate in the restoration, e.g. Isa. 58:12: “And your [the peoples’] ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be

called the repairer of the breach, *the restorer* of streets to dwell in.” God’s restoration would indeed involve the human response, “e.g. Jer. 15:19: “If you return, I will *restore* you, and you will stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth.” In the main, the coming of the New Covenant is referred to as a “restoration.” Cf. Mark 9:12: “And he said to them, ‘Elijah does come first to *restore* all things...’”; Acts 1:6: “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time *restore* the kingdom to Israel?’” And Christ’s second coming will accomplish the final restoration, e.g. Acts 3:19-22: “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time of *restoring* all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”

[- Word study (TDNT): (1) *ajpokaqivsthmi*, “I restore.” “The term is used for God’s restoring of Israel to its land (Jer. 16:15; Hos. 11:11). (2) *ajpokatastavsiV*, “Restoration.” “This comes to be understood messianically and eschatologically, but inner restitution is also required (Am. 5:15), effected by the returning Elijah (Mal. 4:5). In the NT the verb relates to the forerunner (the Baptist), rather than the Messiah (Mark 9:12; 8:28; Matt. 11:10; John 1:21.” “Restoration,” only in Acts 3:20-21, “...strictly the restitution of which the prophets have spoken, or the establishment of what they have spoken.”]

- Within the concept of “restoration” is the much emphasized call to “return” to the Lord. E.g. Joel 2:12, “‘Yet even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the Lord, your God, for his is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...” Zech. 1:3, “Therefore say to them, Thus declares the Lord of hosts: Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.” Mal. 3:7, “From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.”

- The consistent message throughout the NT is also, “Return!” 1 Pet. 2:1, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation.” Heb. 10:32, 35, 36 “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with suffering... Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” Remember Paul’s urging of the Galatians: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel... (Gal. 1:6). Again, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more... Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am...” (Gal. 4:8-9, 12a). Paul’s forecast to Timothy, alerts us, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart

from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared..." (1 Tim 4:1-2).

#### RESTORATION: THREE ELEMENTS:

- When we talk about or consider Restoration, it is helpful to break out Restoration into three distinct elements: a. history, b. movement, and c. principle.

#### HISTORY

- Restoration is a study of human effort. It examines the attempts of those who have gone before to achieve a religious expression that accords with God's will (see Acts 3:22-23). It recognizes both the fallibility of man and man's capacity for accomplishment. It views the historic tapestry as a valuable source for studying human achievement. It identifies successes and is enlightened. It registers failure and is forewarned. It notes sacrifice and perseverance and is encouraged. It understands that current progress is in part due to the legacy of the past and is grateful. Because human efforts are just that, human, subject always to imperfection, Restoration as history is a study of human effort in all of its vicissitudes. It examines surrounding conditions, encouraging breakthroughs, leaders' accomplishments, shifting worldviews, historical developments, etc., and reaps understandings and promptings for the present. The disciplines of historical study of any chapter of human experience are applicable to the study of Restoration history.

#### MOVEMENT

- Restoration is also movement. It is a river of human effort in which each generation rests on the accomplishments of the previous. It does allow itself to believe that progress can be made, not as a blind devotee to Modernism's perfectionism, but because of its confidence in God's willingness to bless—indeed he has sent his Spirit for this very purpose. History sees the progression, and movement identifies the dynamic of a people pressing on to perfection. The student of history becomes the activist of the present, learning from the past, identifying with those who have the common ambition, i.e. to be pleasing and obedient to God, and productive in consequence of living within and practicing the truth that is Christ. The Restorationist is a Christian who senses that his or her responsibility is to live faithfully in the truth and to be fruitful in his or her time, becoming an example and a blessing for those who follow.

#### PRINCIPLE

- But that which gives value to history and justification for movement is principle. The principle is captured in the Lord's prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Mt. 6:9). The principle is to honour God by both learning and doing His will—yes, even on a par with the spirit world!—so that through us God may indeed bring and extend his kingdom among men. This is a high calling, one that includes supreme standards. Knowing the will of God is possible for he has revealed that will through his servants—"All scripture

is inspired of God” (2 Tim 3:16). The principle is committed to the creedal statement, “I believe *this* for ‘thus says the Lord.’” Restoration as principle is the measuring rod for Christian history, the standard of the Christian movement. Because the challenge of Restoration is as high as heaven, there will be no time when history can be said to have had reached perfection or that movement may be permitted to rest on its laurels. Principle says, “Be faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

## A BREF REFLECTION ON THESE THREE ASPECTS

### HISTORY

(1) History is about reality. Cf. the question, “When does history happen?” As soon as the question is asked, it is part of history. Did you miss it?! Humans live in two realms, that of past experience and that of anticipation of the future. You could say that history and hope are separated by the razor thin moment of time, as brief as the tick of the clock. When the present becomes the past, it becomes frozen, unchangeable. The conditions of the past largely determine the shape of the future. A familiar past, i.e. history, is the one certain reality of life. It is that out of which the future flows.

(2) History is about people. Classical history has been about kings, and battles, and dates, boring most people. Real history is about people. It is about people both living and dead. The latter group has a greater population than the former. If you are interested in people (and only egotists are not!) you will be interested in history. What is required is an inquisitive mind to gather in the details and an lively imagination that allows you to put yourself in others’ settings.

(3) History is about context. Each of us lives in a particular setting. To understand each other, whether of recent or distant times, it is necessary to understand the surrounding forces that he or she dealt with. Knowing how vulnerable we are to prevailing conditions in our time, we can be sympathetic to the actions of those who preceded us. Seeing how others handled life in their particular settings, sharpens our own sense of our present context.

(4) History is about culture. In more ways than we might imagine, we are the product of history. How we think, talk, act, and value are largely impacted by the cultural conditioning of our time. The study of history, including that of the cultural forces that worked upon people and groups in other times, can alert us. By becoming conversant with the strength of these conditioning forces, one can develop the perspective the Christian needs to be able to break free of culture in his or her quest to be a true follower of Christ

(5) History is about conflict. The Bible teaches and experience confirms that we live in a broken world. Good is constantly in danger of being submerged with evil. Yesterday’s progress is often abandoned by today’s reversion to sinful ways. The study of history highlights this unending battle. To identify the syncretism of former times, i.e. absorbing

and validating the values of the age, reminds us that syncretism continues to be at work today. The study of history tells us that the battle continues.

## MOVEMENT

(1) In Restoration, movement is about advancing Christianity in our time. History examines how people shared in the movement of Christianity in their day. Restoration as movement has to do with our collective pursuit of the faith in our day. We received as a legacy from the past the accomplishments of our spiritual forbears. Their efforts to live Christ-centered, Bible-based lives provided advantages for us in our time. Now the question remains how vigorously will we receive the torch of truth? What advances will be made in our time? What heritage of faith will be passed on to those who follow after us?

(2) Movements flourish and decline. Arnold Cook, in his work, *Historical Drift*, concludes from his study of religious movements among a variety of church groups that religious movements have, generally, a lifespan of eighty years. From the burst of new energy, to enthusiastic growth, to leveling off, to decline, and collapse, group after group went through this cycle. This should not surprise as this is, in fact, the length of human life, i.e. “three score years and ten, and if by reason of strength, four score years.” While Christianity is a spiritual enterprise, it is conducted by humans operating in a social setting. Indeed, reflecting on our history in Canada, we have gone through two distinct 80 year periods, and are now in our third. The jury is out regarding our current “movement.” Will it find the energy to renew and advance and to prevail? Or will it die out before it can legitimately be called a “movement”?

(3) Legitimate Christian movements are empowered by the Spirit of God. Renewal and refreshment are blessings that flow from God’s energy into his people if indeed they keep faith with him. The Restorationist will examine the current movement to see if there are evidences of calcification. It will reject a movement that has lapsed into merely safeguarding the advances of the past. Rather, in Christ, life is “new every morning.” Restoring New Testament Christianity will be attentive to the shape and practice of the early church that carried the message to the known world in its generation. It will be intently interested in entering into a living relationship with God. Cycling through periods of ebb and flow may well reflect a human church, rather than Christ’s body, indwelt by his Spirit. Do we live and participate in a vigorous movement, or are we content in polishing yesterday’s monument?!

## PRINCIPLE

(1) The “back to the Bible” motif is not new. It has characterized the impulse of believers over the two Millennia that have followed the completion of the inspired Scriptures, e.g. Church Fathers quoting, monks copying, other languages translating, dissenters dying as “heretical” heroes, Reformers confronting, Protestants “awakening,” and Restorationists persisting. Over the centuries, each formulated creed expressed a “restorationist” objective, the reestablishment of truth. Some issue of truth was behind the formulation of

every creed, from the ancient seven ecumenical Councils' creedal statements, to the most recent creedal definitions of newly emerging religious groups. No true Christian is free from "creedal" pronouncements, i.e. "I believe." The genius of the current Restoration Movement is to see that the Bible contains the ultimate and only satisfactory "creedal" statement for the followers of Jesus.

(2) The correction of perceived errors, strayings, apostasies, etc. has carried on from the early days of the church. That a dominating feature of the first Israel was a persistent falling away from God's will, it should not be surprising that the history of the New Israel is marred by frequent and persisting lapses from the will of Christ. Indeed, this was the prediction of Scripture: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

(3) There is an interesting contrast between "truth" and "falsehood" in the NT in which both are emphasized. The conclusion that one must draw from this contrast and emphasis is that Jesus, who is "the truth" (John 14:6), is not "truth" in some indefinable, amorphous cloud of shining personification, e.g. "just accept Jesus and love everybody, that's all." Rather, Jesus is "the truth" because in his life, conduct, and teaching, he is God's message from the eternities. Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus begins his teaching by saying, "I tell you the truth..." Christ's truth is categorical, propositional, and definable. To respect his Lordship is to hang on every word he uttered and give it full respect. This is why Restoration begins with and flows out of the principle, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). Thus we note the attention given in the NT to the usage of "lie" and "truth." "Lie," or *pseudos*, which itself appears 9 times, is joined in a compound usage with 12 other words, e.g. "false brother," "false apostle," "false prophet," etc., with a total of 53 references in the NT! On the other hand, "truth," *alētheia*, and its related words appear in the NT 165 times!

## CONCLUSION

The proposal of this weekend's study is that "restoration" is a general description of God's accomplishment in the establishment of Christ's rule in continuity with and in enrichment of the former rule of God over Israel. As Christianity is dynamic, always moving to a more complete "coming of the kingdom" among men, the restorationist theme must continue as a feature of the Christian age. Today's Christians must respond faithfully to the Biblical word of truth, and they must deal responsibly and critically with the developments in Christendom over the intervening time. Two essentials are indicated: (1) Restoration is firstly God's work and human efforts must be in response to his, and (2) Restoration is an unfinished work until Christ returns.