

RESTORING THE ANCIENT ORDER

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The text of scripture which will introduce our lesson is found in Jeremiah, chapter six and verse sixteen: "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." The figure of the Prophet is that of a traveler who finds himself where a number of roads lead in different directions. He has a definite destination in mind but only one of the roads leads to it. He does not say it makes no difference which road you take just so you are satisfied. He does not say that the wrong road becomes the right road if you think it is! The word *stand* means to **stop**, *see* means to **look**, and *ask* is about equivalent to **listen**. Too, there are many ways to be wrong but only one way to be right. The ways of false teachers are many, but the Lord has but one way. Peter speaks of the "pernicious ways" of "false teachers" and calls them "damnable heresies" and in the same connections speaks of "the way of the Lord" (2 Pet. 2: 1, 2).

There are three things here that determine our attitude toward God to which I would direct your attention at the very threshold of such an investigation as this lesson proposes. First, God has taught man his way. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressor shall fall therein" (Hos. 14:9). Second, God forbids man's way. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Third, God curses perversion. "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:7, 8). These solemn warnings from God mean that it is a hazardous thing to trifle with his Word.

The discussion of "the ancient order" of things in connection with so many modern departures involves a certain amount of history—religious and secular. The Bible sets forth the ancient order, and history puts on record man's departures from it. Thus the Bible and history blend and can be profitably viewed together. Our plan of procedure is to trace the history of the church through several epochs or periods: First, the period of perfection; second, the period of departure, immediately after, which indeed began even during, the apostolic day; third, the period of apostasy, when human ecclesiasticism reigned through dark and dismal ages; fourth, the period of reformation, when noble men sought to shake off the shackles of superstition that fettered them and at least start back in the direction of the Bible and divine authority; and fifth, when the restoration of the ancient order was actually accomplished through men who had the courage of heart to preach the Word of God. Believing that you will follow along in this plan of investigation,

we shall proceed to discuss these things in biblical and historical order.

Perfection In The New Testament

When Adam was created there was not a jar in his whole nature; not a cloud in the sky; no fear of evil and no dread of death. Man fell away by breaking through the restraint of God's law. "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc. 7:29).

So man in his primeval state was perfect. Adam was perfect, made in the "image of God;" he was God's model. God's design. But he fell. Centuries of degeneration separate man as he is from man as he was. Yet we can span the space of time and see man as God created him, not as sin corrupted him; and strive to reattain his lost perfection.

So it was also in the beginning of the new creation that God formed a perfect church. Paul calls it the "new man," which he says God created when Christ became "our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:14-16). Thus it was that out of the two nations—Jew and Gentile—God created the church.

The new man which is the body or church of Christ mentioned in the second chapter of Ephesians was also made perfect in every respect, but apostasy set in, just as it was predicted so many times in the New Testament Scriptures. The second Thessalonian letter says there would be a great "falling away" and says that in this falling away one would arise, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God; or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God." It is further stated here that, "the mystery of iniquity doth already work," which means that a great departure from the truth had already begun to show itself in Paul's day. Paul says again, to Timothy:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

John also says: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: for many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Paul when giving his last warning to the elders of the Church at Ephesus makes this statement:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them (Acts 20: 29,30)

This ought to be enough to prepare the student of church history for the departure from Christianity revealed there. Moses was commanded to "make all things according to the pattern shown thee" and Paul quotes this and emphasizes

the same caution to those who would be Christians (Heb. 8:5). The New Testament is our pattern and everything must conform to it. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 The. 5:21). The church outlined in the New Testament was perfect in government or organization; perfect in doctrine; perfect in its worship.

A Gradual Departure

As we have already learned the departure had begun in Paul's day with the eldership or government of the church. It is admitted by all scholars of all denominations that the only government in the New Testament was local. There were no synods, councils, conferences, conventions, nor associations. Catholics say of their system of church government, "Some parts of the governmental system of the Catholic Church are of divine origin; and many of them are human institutions" (*Externals of the Catholic Church*, page 19). And again, "The divine institution of the three fold hierarchy cannot, of course, be derived from our texts; in fact it cannot in any way be proved directly from the New Testament; it is a Catholic dogma by virtue of a dogmatic tradition, i.e., in a later period of ecclesiastical history the general belief in the divine institution of the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate can be verified and thence be followed on through later centuries, But the dogmatic truth cannot be traced back to Christ himself by analysis of strict historical testimony?" (*Cath. Ency.*, VIII, 334). These are samples of hundreds of admissions that the Catholic system is foreign to the New Testament.

This departure was gradual through several centuries. Soon after the Apostles, one of the elders of each congregation began to assume a place above the other elders, a sort of chairman elder. In a century or so, the affairs of congregations began to be administered by only one man and he began to assume control over smaller churches nearby and this gave rise to the "diocesan Bishop." Those in larger cities soon began to usurp control over a greater territory and were called "Metropolitan Bishops." After a few centuries of struggling for the supremacy by five great cities of the world the contestants were at last reduced to two, Constantinople and Rome. In the year 1054, the world was divided by them into Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic.

The Apostasy

The departure began in the days of the Apostles but the permanent division resulted when the Nicene creed was formed. Where the New Testament had been the only creed, the Nicene Council substituted therefore a human creed, and a new body had its beginning. A new name was needed and we meet for the first time "the Catholic Church" as it is now used. The church with a new name and a new creed was the new church. This begins the infancy period of Catholicism but she did not reach her present dimensions and character until about the thirteenth century. Her seven sacraments are a creation of the thirteenth century, the people were permitted to have the wine as well as the bread until about the same time.

Immersion was practiced until the fourteenth century. They have apostatized until there is not a vestige of Christianity to be found in their system. In lieu of the New Testament practices discarded, they have paganism as this Catholic authority admits: "It is interesting to note how often our church has availed herself of practices which were in common use among pagans" (*Externals of the Catholic Church*, page 156).

The Reformatory Movement

Not only was the Bible forgotten as a book of authority by the Catholic Church but her political yoke became so galling that her overthrow was inevitable. The printing press was invented and Bibles began to flood the earth and a new day was dawning. The blood of the martyrs she had slain was crying from the ground! To read the article on the inquisition in the Catholic Encyclopedia of how they sealed men in dungeons, roasted them on the rack, burned them at the stake, for the crime of thinking, speaking, and worshipping contrary to the Catholic system, makes us rejoice to read of Luther, Calvin, and others who arose to break her power.

The first Protestant denomination to break away was the Lutheran Church, about the year 1530. But instead of discarding her human doctrines and practices he proceeded on the platform of retaining everything not expressly forbidden. He knew he was not on scriptural ground for he said: "The Pope in condemning Huss has condemned the Gospel. I have gone five times as far as he, and yet I greatly fear I have not gone far enough" (Martin Luther, *D'Aubigne's History*, page 173). So the Lutheran Church is **not** the New Testament church.

The Church of England was the next to begin. King Henry VIII, in order to marry his wife's waiting maid, severed the portion of the Catholic Church in his dominions from the Pope, about twenty years after the Lutheran Church began. In this country it is known as the Episcopal Church. At first there was no difference between it and the Catholic Church and it has made but few changes until this day. Both these denominations have human names, human creeds, and human practices and neither of them is the New Testament church.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was established by John Wesley in 1784, but like Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians has a human name, a human creed, and human practices. For instance the Catholic Church legalized sprinkling in 1311 and when the Episcopalian Church came out of Catholicism they carried it with them. When the Methodist Church came out of the Episcopalian Church they retained it. But it is no more Scriptural in the Methodist Church than in the Catholic. In fact the Catholic Church taunts the Protestant denominations for the many things they have borrowed from Rome which Rome admits are not Scriptural!

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began in the city of Louisville Kentucky, as a result of the slavery question.

Nobody ever read of a Baptist Church in the New Testament. The Baptist creed is no better than the Catholic creed because it is human also. Their scholars do not pretend to find the Baptist Church in history before the seventeenth century. Immersion began to be practiced and the name Baptist Church came into use about 1641 and 1644. Not only do they have a human name and a human creed but they, too, admit that their practice is not according to the New Testament pattern (*Standard Baptist Manual*, page 22).

The Presbyterian churches in similar manner grew out of the work of John Calvin. Time would fail us to picture fully the rise of a host of smaller denominations during the nineteenth century. Instead of diminishing in number, they increase with the passing years, until there were 238 different religious bodies reported in the last federal census.

The Restoration Plea

The Catholic Church blames the multiplying of Protestant denominations on the unrestricted use of the Bible in the hands of the people, but this is not the case. It is caused by their disregard for it. We do not need a reformation of human religions but a return to the divine one. We do not need to write better creeds than those of the existing denominations but to discard them. We do not need to invent a new name but to wear the divinely given names of the New Testament. **We do not need reformation but restoration!** Let us do away with popes, archbishops presiding elders, stewards, and all governmental machinery except the local congregation. The words *elders*, *bishop*, *pastor*, *presbyter*, all refer to the same person, one of the rulers of a local congregation. No church of the New Testament had just one. Let us have a plurality in every congregation.

Let us not teach that we are saved by faith only when our pattern (The New Testament) says, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not **by faith only**" (Jam. 2:24; emphasis added); let us not contend that children are under condemnation, because of the mistakes of their parents and contradict the Bible which says, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" (Eze. 18:20). The pattern says that baptism is a burial (Rom. 6:3, 4; Col. 2:12) so let us teach it and practice it. Water alone was never sprinkled upon anybody for anything from Genesis to Revelation. The pattern says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and a puny, frail human being should be afraid to teach that he that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved.

If we worship according to the pattern we will sing and not play, and he who plays adds to the word of God. We will give of our own means instead of trying to get money out of some one else and this will be done on the First Day of the Week (1 Cor. 16:1,2). One who follows the pattern does not forsake the assembling together (Heb. 10:25) for the breaking of bread on the First Day of the Week.

As for instrumental music, it was David's invention in the Old Testament among the Jews, and since that time it became the adopted child of the Roman Catholic church. John Calvin said that "the Catholics foolishly borrowed it from the

Jews," and let us once more add that the Protestants borrowed it from the Catholics. The Christian Church (self-styled and so-called) borrowed it from the Protestants, and the New Testament Church never used it. You may read every passage in the New Testament bearing on the subject from the time that Jesus and his disciples at the institution of the Lord's Supper "sang a hymn and went out," through the book of Acts, through the epistles to the church, and all the instruction the Holy Spirit has given on how to worship God in the church of Jesus Christ, and the world *sing* exhausts the command on the subject. That is the limit of the command, friends, and we simply insist that it should be the limit of our practice. Instrumental music was thus a relic of Judaism until Rome adopted it, and Protestants have not learned to leave Rome's relics and images in Rome. Her daughters imitate her ways, and so do her stepchildren—but the Bible says "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing"—that was Paul's exhortation to the church to abandon every human particle in religion, and it is our plea to you tonight.

Some think that because there was probably no person on earth for a long period of time who worshipped exactly according to the New Testament that the church Jesus established ceased to exist, and, that the best thing we can now do is to find a denomination which suits us and join it. But the word is the seed (Luke 8:11) and the church or kingdom is not destroyed until the seed is destroyed, and since the word is the "incorruptible seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), it cannot be destroyed. Therefore, the church or kingdom cannot be destroyed and Paul said, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). The church of Christ is here and will be as long as man inhabits the earth. Those who believed, repented, and were baptized in that day were **added** (they did not join the church) and the same commands obeyed today will bring the same result (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:18). There will be no uncertainty about it. If we would all do this the Lord would add us to the same church. Obeying the Baptist **Manual** makes one a Baptist, obeying the *Methodist Discipline* makes a Methodist, and obeying the *Catechism* make Catholics, and so with all the denominations, but obedience to the New Testament will never make anything but Christians. Will you not be just a Christian by leaving that institution you can't read about and obeying the gospel of Christ?

Through all history, down the surging stream of time, friends, there has been the ever present trend away from God's word. It was so in the Old Testament. Israel wandered; she was ever forward and wayward. Moses lifted the voice of tearful pleading against her deviations and God raised up prophet after prophet to call her back. But hers was a history of rebellion and of its inevitable result—her final rejection. To the call of Jeremiah to "ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein," Israel replied: "We will not walk therein." Is that not the spirit of all innovation and departure from God today? Do we not see and hear such in our very midst these days? Friends, the Word of God is divine, His

commands are immutable, His law is inexorable, His authority is supreme, and He will not hold you guiltless who trample it under your feet. We call upon you to lay down your party creeds and your party names, your human doctrines and dogmas, your denominational affiliations and all that is of no higher authority than men and their movements, to come and strike hands with us across the Bible—the Word of God. For your soul's salvation and for heaven's hope, will you not come?~

Deceased
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