

"Restoring Christianity"

When things are broken, we want to fix them. 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." And today we're gonna be talking about restoring what's broken.

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

The Lord Jesus is in the saving and the restoring business. He purifies broken and sinful souls. He said in Luke 5:31 to 32, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I've 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 verse 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 those who follow false beliefs or practices so that they can leave error and come to the truth. The concept of restoration is neither impossible nor misguided, for the Lord is in the restoring business.

Now we offer this study on restoring Christianity free. If you'd like a printed copy of our study and 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 at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Jude verses 3 and 4, and explore why we should follow the Lord in our faith and practice.

Our reading today comes from the little letter of Jude verses 3 and 4. And here he encourages them to look very closely at the word of God and to hang on to the teachings that are there.

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.

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That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we're thankful that you did hand down to us the things that we most needed to know. And Father help us to be devoted to what You've taught us. To obey You always and to love You always. 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 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 6:17 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." 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 2 Tim. 1 and verse 13 says, "Follow the pattern of the sound (that is healthy) words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus," To suggest that there are no patterns to follow is to deny what the Lord commands and what faithful Christians did. If the sun, the planets, and the moon in our universe follow a pattern, if every cell in our body has a DNA pattern, 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 17:20 to 23 where Jesus prayed: "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; 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 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. He said in 2 Peter 3:17 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 his disciples would be "sanctified in the truth" (John 17 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 it corrupts the truth by

blending it with the culture. To hold to the truth, we can't compromise but we 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's better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals, than falsehood that comforts and then kills. It's not love and it's not friendship if we fail to declare the whole counsel of God. It's 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. You see 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."

Now restoring is not the same as reforming. Reforming suggests a makeover that improves the existing system. Restoring, however, suggests the idea of bringing something back to an earlier and better condition. Much of what passes for Christianity today has little likeness to the ideals found in the New Testament. Nor what Jesus expected the church to be in all ages. 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've pursued whatever culture dictates. Some have so divorced themselves from the truth found in Scripture 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 and the same error.

Jesus walks among His churches and He'll judge them on the last day by His teaching, His word, a, will te, do that, that judging (John 12 and verse 48). Now since the word of the Lord is authoritative to the last day. The same standard will be applied to everybody from the beginning to the end. 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 and establishes their own religious group after their own desires, they aren't following the will of God. Religious people can easily assume 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? The answer is simple: repent! That's what Jesus said to the seven churches of Asia. Repentance is a turning away from the worldly and human and turning toward the way of the Lord. 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 against restoration is to argue against repentance.

Now no one can remain in error and still please God. In the early church, false teachers said Jesus did not come in the flesh. John said in 2 John 9 to 11, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; 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 to abide in the teaching of Christ in order to "have God." These false teachers were lying about Jesus and they were guilty of evil deeds. What do you do when you find out that you have been deceived? 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. And 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 verse 12). Not dynamic preachers, not charismatic leaders, not cleverly written books, not new evangelistic gimmicks, not community-changing service projects. The power in the word of God resets wandering priorities, and it puts to death consumer-driven passions, and recalibrates out values to God's eternal standards.”

King Hezekiah led Judah to repent of evil. Hezekiah followed an evil king who led Judah into idolatry. And he wanted to bring Israel back to the way of God. 2 Kings 18:3 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 broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. 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. He trusted in the LORD, 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; and 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.”

Well, 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” (2 Kings 23 verses 2 and 3). Josiah destroyed everything idolatrous and evil. Josiah's example of repentance restored Judah to God's teaching. And if we find that we're in error, let's do the same thing!

The Bible is the complete, the complete and final authority. And just as a seed will produce only after its 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). The Word of God works today the same way it did when the Lord gave it. The work of restoration, then, is actually soul-winning, since it leads a lost soul out of sinful error and into God's saving grace.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father help us to look deeply into Your word and to follow the things that are there. Help us to pay much closer attention to what there was written so that we may not stray from it. And help us to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Imagine you're driving and come upon an automobile accident. And you find a man there who is injured; his leg is grievously broken. Now he's in great agony and crying for help. You immediately call 9-1-1, and an Emergency Medical Team arrives soon. Well, the man tells the technician, “Oh, give me something to deaden the pain! Just knock me out!” Well, surely he'll give him something to ease the pain; but you know what, he won't stop there. He'll also find ways to set that leg. Maybe it will require

emergency surgery later on. But if the leg is not set back into place, the man's leg will not heal. 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 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 our 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.

Now becoming a Christian includes both our salvation and our commitment to follow Christ and to be united with Him. Now being united with Christ takes place when we follow that form of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. 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. At that time God washes away our sins and makes us His child. My friend, don't wait to be united with Christ!

We hope 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 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 download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. And you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry," and be sure to "like" the programs. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. 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 the program that you watch and want them too as well. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.