

Does the Church Need Restoration?



Restoration (Part 6)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week sharing with you out of truths that life has taught me, truths that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same for you.

First of all, let me say "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

All last week I was sharing with you how God is working out His end-time purposes in our world today. I explained how God's purposes center in the two peoples to whom He has committed Himself by covenants that He will not break; that is, to Israel and to the Church. I said that God's purposes for each of these two peoples, for Israel and for the Church, can be summed up in one word: restoration.

I defined "restoration" as the process of putting things back in their right place and their right condition. I pointed out that the need for restoration necessarily indicates that the things to be restored have not been in their right place and their right condition.

This week I'm going to deal in some detail with the restoration of the Church. Then in the week following I will deal with the restoration of Israel.

Now if we speak of the restoration of the Church, that implies that the Church needs restoring; that is, by our definition, that in some way the Church has not been in its right place or its right condition. Is this true? If so, in what ways does the Church need restoring? Now these are the questions I will now attempt to answer. But just let me repeat them. Is it true that the Church has not been in its right place and condition? And if so, in what ways does the Church need restoring?

We have only one Scriptural standard by which to determine what God intends the Church to be like and that is the Church as originally brought into being by God and as portrayed in the New Testament, primarily in the book of Acts. Now, the New Testament Church certainly had problems. And they are very freely mentioned in the New

Testament. There is no attempt to cover over or hush up the problems. But in spite of all its problems the New Testament Church was in general marked by the following seven features, and I will enumerate these seven features.

Number 1: There was general unity among all believers. Within that unity there were many variations. Some believers still worshipped in synagogues, others formed new meeting places. There were differences of culture and other differences. Yet, within it all there was a general unity among all believers. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth he did not write to the Baptist Church or the Presbyterian Church or the Episcopal Church or the Catholic Church. There were not a lot of different churches with different labels. In every main city there was just one church. This is an objective historical fact. Certainly it is far from the situation that we're familiar with today.

Secondly, among the New Testament Christians there was in general a willingness to sacrifice all, including life itself, for the cause of Christ. In most cases when one became a Christian—and in those days one had to accept as a real possibility that it might cost one's life. Very manifestly, that willingness to sacrifice all is not far and amongst all church members of professing Christians today. In fact, even comparatively small sacrifices are often resented.

Thirdly, in the New Testament Church there was a commitment to the commission of Jesus to carry the Gospel to all nations of the known world. And within the first century, the Church practically succeeded in accomplishing that task. In the remaining eighteen or nineteen centuries since then it could be said that in some ways the Church has retrogressed. There is a higher proportion of people in the world today who have never heard the Gospel than there was at the end of the first century.

Fourthly, in the New Testament Church there were spiritual authority and power that made an impact on entire cities and provinces. At one point the opponents of the Gospel made this complaint about preachers that had come to their city: "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6). They might not welcome them but they certainly could not ignore them.

Today in many parts of our Western world the Church is regarded by the majority of people as an anachronism—something that is long out of date. They don't fight it, they don't oppose it, they simply ignore it.

Fifthly, in the early church there was the regular exercise of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. This wasn't something special or strange or confined to some particular group or sect, it was part of the normal life of the whole Church.

Sixthly, in the New Testament Church there was unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Scripture. Today we have moved far from that. Many church leaders in various different denominations make pronouncements that deny even the simple basics of Gospel truth such as the deity of Jesus or the virgin birth or the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Seventhly, and lastly, in the New Testament Church there was in general a lifestyle that sharply distinguished believers from the unbelieving world around them. Today this could no longer be said. Many times it's possible for two professing Christians to work side by side in the same office or factory and not even know that the other is also a believer.

I'm just going to repeat that list of seven features that characterize the early church. I think it's important that we get a clear picture of them without going into details.

First of all, there was general unity among all believers.

Secondly, there was in general a willingness to sacrifice all, even life itself for the cause of Christ.

Thirdly, there was a commitment to the commission of Jesus to carry the Gospel to all nations of the known world.

Fourthly, there was spiritual authority and power that made an impact on entire cities and provinces.

Fifthly, there was a regular exercise of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Sixthly, there was unquestioning acceptance of the authority of Scripture.

Seventhly, there was a lifestyle for believers that sharply distinguished them from the unbelieving world around about them.

Now, as I have already indicated, if we look at the church as we know it, and let's confine ourselves to the Western Hemisphere. And let's not think about the church all around the world, but let's look at the church as we know it in the United States, Canada, Europe—and probably Latin America as well, Australia and New Zealand (what we might call, somewhat mistakenly, the free nations). Some groups of Christians in some of these nations reproduced some of these features. Perhaps a few reproduce nearly all of these features. For instance, there are groups that have the regular

exercise of spiritual gifts, that are committed to world evangelism, that are dedicated to the point of sacrificing all, that do acknowledge the authority of Scripture, and probably such groups are distinguished to some considerable extent by their lifestyle from the unbelievers round about them. However, these groups are definitely in a minority and I think it would be hard to find many groups that have even five or six of these distinguishing features of the early Church. But certainly there is one feature today that is completely lacking. That is unity. We are totally in a condition of disunity.

Facing this realistic assessment of the church as we know it today, we have to ask ourselves certain questions. First, Has God changed His plan or His standard for the church? My answer is No. God started the church the way He wanted it, and He's never changed. In general, God starts things off right. That's one of the features of God's dealings.

Second question: Is God really able to restore the church to its right condition? How would you answer that? I think many people would consider it absolutely unthinkable and impossible. But my answer is Yes, God is able to restore the church to its right condition. I believe He's set about that task and I believe that God never undertook a task that He's not able to complete. I believe that God has given a commitment in Scripture. Let me read to you from Ephesians 5:25–27. Paul says:

> "...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; [That's the measure of God's commitment to the church—that Christ gave Himself. Why did He give Himself?] that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." (NAS)

Christ is working on the church to produce in her certain distinctive characteristics. She shall be glorious, without blemish, holy and blameless. That is God's objective. I believe He's going to achieve it.

All right. Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow, and for the rest of this week, I'll be speaking in a practical way about just what is involved in the restoration of the church. I will outline some simple scriptural steps that can lead us back to the kind of unity that God intends.

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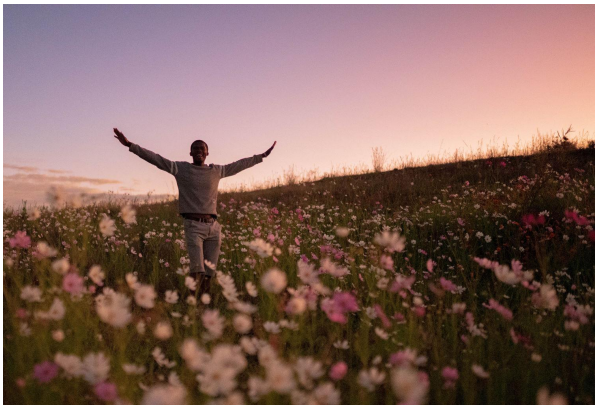

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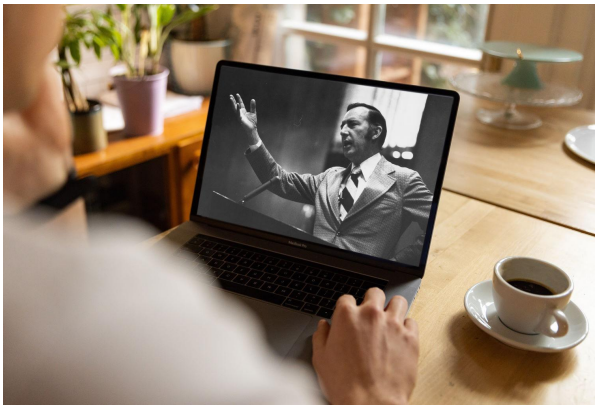

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