

“Seek the Ancient Paths!”

Jeremiah 6:16

Intro. – A young boy was working diligently at his arithmetic. He was soliciting his dad’s help when he asked, “If a plumber was paid \$13 a day, how much did he earn in four days?” The dad replied, No wonder you can’t figure it out. That’s not arithmetic, that’s ancient history!”

Jeremiah 6:16 addresses the matter of history. “Thus says the Lord stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls.”

Our heritage goes back to a movement that sought to do nothing more and nothing less than to seek unity on the basis of God’s Word alone. Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” What a wonderful heritage we have being a part of the Restoration Movement. Personally, I am indebted to those in my past who instilled in my life the significance of knowing and appreciating this heritage.

With that in mind, indulge me for a few minutes (3min 9 sec) and listen to one of those people. He identifies himself from the onset. He is L. Edsil Dale, past teacher.

Did you hear what he (L. Edsil Dale) said? “Going back into rather than coming back out of...” Are we listening to what he said? Evidently not. It’s kind of like Archie Bunker and what he said to his wife in an episode of *All in the Family*, “Edith, the reason you don’t understand me is because I’m talkin’ to you in English and you’re listenin’ to me in Dingbat.”

The question today is; are we listening with renewed hearts or are we listening with dingbat ears? Are we intent upon seeking unity on the basis of God’s Word alone or are we willing to revert back to manmade creeds, counsels and statements of faith?

Zoo visitors were amazed to see in a cage labeled “Co-Existence” a lion and some lambs. Some asked the keepers to explain how this could be. One of the zoo’s keepers was reported to have said, “It’s nothing. Just add a few fresh lambs ever now and then and everyone is happy.”

Yea, appearances mean very little if anything in the grand scheme of things. What matters is God’s plan for unity/harmony works! And because it works, our intent must be to *restore* it!

Purpose: to show the Restoration Moment IS all about unity on the basis of Biblical authority

In this message want to look at where The Restoration Movement IS and where it is going. Is the plea of RM valid today or are those of us grateful for this heritage dinosaurs waiting only for extension? Let’s look at the RM today and where it is headed:

I It is a RETURN TO Movement

- Illus. – Warren Wiersbe tells of a rather pious church member who thought himself quite the Christian. A Bible School teacher asked this individual to speak to a class of primary girls and boys. This pious man pompously stood before this class and asked, “Why do you think people call me a Christian?” After an embarrassingly long silence, a small voice in the back said, “Because they don’t know you?”
- people may doubt what you say, but most of the time they believe what you do!
- so true with the local church and why *restoring* must take precedence over *reforming*:

A. A Return to the Past

1. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Wesley and others set out to *reform* the church.

2. Other *reform* movements were launched by Otterbein, George Fox, Roger Williams and others.
3. But when the Campbells, Walter Scott, B.W. Stone, Raccoon John Smith and others came along, they sought NOT to *reform* but to *restore*...
4. Their intent and purpose was clear: Unity on the basis of God's Word alone to evangelize the lost...

B. A Return to the Beginning

1. Those of the RM seek to go back beyond Wesley, Zwingli, Calvin and Luther, beyond Rome and her traditions... beyond Constantinople and Greek Orthodoxy... we seek to go all the way back to Jerusalem and the beginning of our Lord's Church there on the day of Pentecost!
2. Anything short of this will not achieve the ideal of the RM... more sign. our Lord! Returning the church to her original condition... the RM is a RETURN movement!...

II It is an UNDENOMINATIONAL Movement

- what do we mean "undenominational"
- three words are often but wrongly used interchangeably along these lines:

A. "Interdenominational"

1. Dictionary: "cooperation occurring between or among denominations..."
2. Most frequently demonstrated when a community has an "interdenominational revival/concert, youth rally etc.
3. More times than not, doctrinal differences are *compromised* until afterwards. Then each "group" competes for the "converts" or "prospects" at these gatherings.
4. Presently, more and more Christian/Ch. of Christ are reveling in the fact that they can and are *interdenominational* in their outreach...

B. "Nondenominational"

1. Simply means a person or group is not restricted to one denomination.
2. Many today bill themselves this way. In turn they jump from group to group *adjusting* their message so as not to offend.
3. Illus. – publishers often produce literature that is "nondenominational" trying to print only that which will offend no one.
 - a. Illus. – good luck in trying not to offend anyone. In 8/9/96 a disabled individual in Texas objected to the name "Cripple Creek" for a nearby stream. He objected because he took it as a putdown to handicap people. The US board of Geographic Names (responsible for all federal government maps) says, the latest figure on *objectionable* names is in the 80,000 figure!...
 - b. why we see churches using terminology "unchurched"... Lord's Supper in a back room... and changing their names to "community churches"...

C. "Undenominational"

1. One not belonging to a denomination – e.g. not an "evangelical," nor a "protestant," or any other human name that is used to identify certain religious groups.

2. Simply means we ‘re *Christians only*” (note: not only Christians, but Xtians only!)
3. God’s plan is not for various groups to merge to make larger organizations with greater political clout... Bible reveals nothing of the Lord’s church being involved with headquarters, organizations, and conventions determining policy...

In summary, what then is the difference in these three terms? One identifies the plan of God as revealed in Scripture, while the others go contrary to the prayer and desire of our Lord in John 17 and to the preaching of the apostles. Are we about reforming or restoring. RM is an *undenominational movement!*

III It is a DOCTRINAL Movement

- Acts 1 Jesus appeared for 40 days after His resurrection and spoke of *things concerning the kingdom of God*. In other words He spoke on doctrinal matters
- A. Doctrine is Teaching (vsa versa)
1. Note with me that “right doctrine” or “sound doctrine” is a primary concern of the Apostle Paul as he writes to two preachers in local churches – Timothy and Titus:
 - a. 1 Timothy 1:10 “...and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”
 - b. 1 Timothy 4:6 “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”
 - c. 1 Timothy 4:16 “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things...”
 - d. 2 Timothy 1:13 “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”
 - e. Titus 2:1 “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.”
 - f. Titus 2:7 “...in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified...”
 - g. Titus 2:15 “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority...”
 2. Restoration Movement is not about questioning anyone’s sincerity nor determining anyone’s eternity... It’s all about appealing to people on the basis of God’s Word...
 3. Sound doctrine has always been key to the plea for unity in the RM.
- B. Doctrine is Most Practical
1. Hearing today the desire for “practical” sermons/lessons... Everything is about being practical...
 2. Illus. “The Lite Church” ... my point in this is the most practical thing = doctrine!..
 3. When churches substitute 15minute sermonetts on philosophical, ethical and current events, in the pursuit of the practical these churches have *reformed* not *restored!*
- C. Doctrine is Key
1. How do we know “doctrine” is key – remember *Speak where the Scriptures speak... Unity on the basis of God’s Word alone.*

2. The RM past success and present circumstances are wholly dependent upon the faithful presentation of Scripture... The extent to which this movement neglects/avoids *sound doctrine* is the extent to which this movement will accomplish or fail its plea...

Conclusion: In summary/conclusion, I was reading of a noted preacher who a biographer wrote, "Prick him anywhere and he bleeds the Bible." Such is none truer than Edsil Dale. Remember that clip? It was made in 1979!

My point? His assessment of the past, present and future of the Restoration Movement is "spot on." How we need to get back to the basics and re-establish strong Biblical local churches. It's not going to happen through post-modern thought; nor will it happen through the emergent church. We're going to have to bleed the Bible anywhere we get pricked!

I love Thy Church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end.

The Restoration Movement in the past and in the present is solid. It is grounded on Biblical truth. May we hold true to our Lord and restore New Testament Christianity knowing such is exactly what this old world needs.