

Chapter 15

Going Back for Your Future

*“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings”*

(Isaiah 58:12).

The truths of the restoration are filtering into a church culture which has vacillated from authoritarianism to anarchy. The Lord has shown and confirmed for many that these truths are being poured forth in advance of the darkest moments this country has yet experienced. There is coming a time when many will repent and turn to God.

As these converts gather together to fulfill the “one-anothering” verses in the New Testament, we can expect the Nicolaitan spirit to again attempt to assert its dominance. The sacerdotal, intermediary role of individuals influenced by this spirit will be self-evident: They will attempt to control what God will be doing and will desire personal pre-eminence in it. The restoration message stands in opposition to this spirit. The nameless and faceless followers of Jesus who radiate *His* countenance will be the ones the Lord will use.

The Gospel of the dark period to come will not be the “easy believe-ism” of most so-called “gospels” found in the US today. Unbelievers will reject these for what they are, shallow and man-made. Times will be so desperate that seekers will want the Gospel that Jesus spoke of: “*Whoever trusts in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were later to receive” (John 7:38,39). The Hebrew Bible was the only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words. Thus, today’s followers of Jesus must study the Old Testament to discover what that saving trust encompasses.

Even now this Gospel is being embraced by more and more people. Many were at one time deceived. They had been told that acknowledging the truth of certain Bible verses would be sufficient for salvation even if no evidence of the Spirit’s work was noticeable in them. Those who believed that counterfeit gospel are painfully aware that their lives were not changed. They have continued in frustration and sin all this time. But how overjoyed they are when they hear the Gospel of the Hebrew Bible and realize that *true repentance* chooses to *turn away from sin and walk in righteousness* by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Repentance grieves you that you have grieved God. You hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that only Jesus can give. The believer who is indwelt by the Spirit of God *continues* to repent at the Spirit’s prompting in order to bear Kingdom fruit.

The true Gospel puts you in relationship with all other followers of Jesus through the covenant in His blood. His shed blood has paid the penalty of your sin. Yet He also specifies this requirement on your part: to forgive those who have sinned against you. Jesus Himself declared, “*If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matthew 6:15). How can you hold onto unforgiveness when the King of glory has offered you *His* forgiveness? Think about it.

You choose to forgive by continually yielding your rights so that you can fully and wholeheartedly love God. Obedient love trusts God to work in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (see Philippians 2:13). Those who put their trust in Jesus as the Scripture has said *will* shine with His presence in the dark days to come.

Patience and Preparation

God is calling the followers of Jesus to be patient and to hold onto their loving trust in Him. *He will build* the Church of His plans. You can join His labors by discovering His assignment for you. That which is being restored has not been seen since the early centuries. Although many are being prepared by the Spirit through different facets of the restoration, no one person has the full picture. Cooperation and coordination will hallmark the togetherness of the Church of the dark days to come.

God's command to Restoration Ministries was to *share this message* of restoration. Other followers of Jesus are being prepared and called to plant the faith communities of the *Restored Church*, and still others to lead them as biblical elders. As restoration truths are being revealed, prepare yourself to fully follow the Lord by doing your part.

First, make sure that you have embraced the true Gospel of Jesus, one in which evidence of the Spirit's vitality in you flows like living water through your life. This is a Gospel of God's power to reach your *heart*, not just your intellect. It is a life walk that demonstrates a loving-trust, not a decision of reason that has been added on to a life of self-determination. One of the fruits of this Gospel is a trusting abandonment to the Lord and to His will, evidenced by a growth in righteousness, humility, and sacrificial love.

Second, a good portion of the Bible has been written using *plural* word forms. Remember that our Jewish forefathers in the faith were conscious of their communal self-awareness. Their very identity was based on an *interconnectedness* with all other followers of Jesus.

Communal awareness is a critical feature of the Restored Church. For instance: *"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose"* (Philippians 2:12,13). The words "your" and "you" in this passage are plural, not singular. Our Father wants us to work out our salvation *together*. Like links in a chain, a faith community is no stronger than its weakest person. Relational responsibility demands that our love translates into action.

Elsewhere Scripture highlights the community/family aspect of following Jesus. Through biblical truths, the Holy Spirit:

- Enables us *together* to grow in *our* relationship with *our* Lord (Colossians 1:10-12).
- Holds us *together* and strengthens *our* relationships with each other (Hebrews 10:23-25).
- Heals us *collectively* (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24).
- Equips us to share the Gospel *together* (1 Peter 3:14,15).
- Encourages us to fight *together* in the battle and fortifies us to persevere *together* (Ephesians 6:10-18, James 1:2-4).

The intensity of individualism in the US is so strong that people can be part of a group yet have no sense of intimate belonging. Because of this singular mindset, believers can study the Bible for *personal* edification but give no thought to how it applies to *community* purposes. Yet many passages of promise are given *collectively* rather than individually. Even the leadership of a faith community is a group, or collegial, effort. The level of *group awareness* and *belonging* that you experience with others motivates your interaction—your one-anothering—with that body of people.

Many biblical passages command you to carry out certain loving activities toward others. Even spiritual gifts have not been given to benefit yourself, but are God's means to bless

His people *through* you. You are God's conduit into which He pours the grace that is meant to flow out of you onto others.

Nothing in the Bible supports the individualist, isolationist view of American Christianity. Only the power of the true Gospel can compel followers of Jesus to live out the *relational belonging* the Bible calls for. This Gospel is being restored to the Church today. But what will the *extended family* groups born as a result of this Gospel look like? How will they function?

Transition to the Restored Church

Initially, as people embrace the restored Gospel, new gatherings of Christians may come together without spiritually mature men who are prepared to shepherd them. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, however, guidance will come from Him. As in the early Church, confirmation of God's revelation and guidance for the group will incorporate the collective process of agreement by two or three who are mature in Him. Because the indwelling Spirit has apportioned gifts to each believer, the faith community can work in a coordinated manner.

As our Father recruits them, elders will be raised up for fatherly role-modeling and leadership. In the early Church, those who came from a Jewish background as synagogue leaders were often able to carry over their wisdom and experience into the new congregation setting. The Church today does not always have the luxury of wise, experienced spiritual fathers. The leadership of the future may need time to develop into mentors who reflect the Father's love.

Each newly planted church gathering is recognized as a "church body" even if there are not yet elders. The priority need, however, is for mature men to be trained up to exercise protection, instruction, and oversight. The ancient synagogues had functioned autonomously even while aware of their larger family context. So should each faith community live out Scripture on behalf of one another locally, yet maintain an ever-present concern and regard for the Body of Christ around the world.

The Right of First Refusal

The percentage of the population represented by people over forty in the U.S. has grown substantially in recent decades. At the same time, their influence and leadership are barely felt in our faith communities. What a valuable, untapped resource is available to the *Restored Church*! How they are needed to take their rightful place of leading, mentoring, and equipping.

Some senior believers may not be aware of the biblical role that qualified older men played in pastoring the faith communities of the early Church. And the younger men who are currently leading faith communities while struggling to balance career and/or family needs must be willing to yield to the sages in their midst.

Qualified older men must have the "right of first refusal" to assume their proper places of authority, service, and influence in their faith communities. Some older followers of Jesus may have squandered their time and missed some of the character development God had intended for them. These, too, must have the opportunity to repent and to be mentored by the true elders. Men who are approaching the age of *zaken* and have been serving others with a shepherd's heart need to be given special attention so that they can be prepared to lead faith communities when the time comes. Remember the principle of succession!