

**WHAT
KIND OF
CHURCH
IS THIS?**

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BE

RESTORED

by Trevor DeVage

Messy . . . that is part of what I love about the early church. It was full of messy and unlikely people who were chosen to usher in Christ's message to the world. Open the book of Acts and you'll notice that these church pioneers shared in all things, cared for one another, added to their number daily, broke bread regularly, and carried the message of hope continually. They were all ordinary and messy men and women just like you and me. And out of this mess, Christ reached the world with his message.

I love the Restoration Movement. I love that it was birthed out of a desire to be more like Christ and less like man. I love it was given life out of an understanding that we are messy men and women who are leading and serving the kingdom of God. And God loves using our restored mess to restore others from their messes and make masterpieces and mosaics of all our lives. I love that an oft-spoken mantra of our movement is, "We are not the only Christians, but Christians only." And I honestly

think this still needs to be restored. We need to stop seeing ourselves as the only Christians.

I have been around folks who truly believe we who claim to be a part of this movement are right and everyone else is wrong. People of this mind-set have decided we are no longer messy but everyone else is, and that's a problem. I have met dozens of folks who are not "Restoration pastors" whom I believe will share the same eternity as me. I have met other messy messengers who have a deep desire to help as many people see Jesus as possible.

We in the Restoration Movement will not be the only ones in Heaven. Jesus redeems and restores people from all walks and all denominations. I am not saying we should throw out the essentials of theology, but that if we really want to restore what God intended, we must regain a sense that we are not the only Christians, but Christians only. I thank God daily I get to be a part of leading his beautiful mess—the church.

Trevor DeVage serves as lead pastor with
Christ's Church Mason in Mason, Ohio.

one that goes to

The Missouri River—the “Big Muddy”—runs past the city of Omaha, Nebraska. If we wanted to get pure, unpolluted water from this river, we have two basic choices. We might, as Omaha has done, install a filter to remove the mud that has accumulated in the water during the river’s meandering path south and east. But that treats only a small portion of the water, and the great body of the river runs on as muddy as before. If, however, we go to the source, we would find pure water that comes fresh from the wellspring.

Similarly, if we want the pure, unadulterated Christianity given through divine inspiration, we must go back to the source, before the evils and impurities entered the church. Herein is the difference between Restoration and Reformation.

I have just given you one of my favorite illustrations

about unity. I found it years ago in the book *600 Doctrinal Illustrations* published by Standard Publishing in 1941.

We should seek unity in the church, if for no other reason, because Jesus prayed for it. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed for himself and his disciples. Then he prayed, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20, 21).

So, we can’t criticize a biblical emphasis on unity. To do so would be to criticize this prayer of Jesus the night before his death on the cross. Jesus stated clearly that the world would not believe if there were not unity in the church. To have

this, we must go back to the source.

I do not believe such unity exists in the churches today. As a result, we have failed to evangelize the world, and the church seems to have more divisions today than in the past. While many efforts toward unity have been made, our own brotherhood, the Restoration Movement, has been about the only group that constantly reminds us to go back to the source.

We seem to meld together both practical and scriptural emphases when we stay with our plea of getting back to what the New Testament teaches about salvation, church structure, and Christian living. This concept of going back to the New Testament for our doctrine and structure seems to be very acceptable in our present culture of tolerance concerning almost everything. There is still a great opportunity for

the SOURCE

by Ben Merold

this brotherhood of local churches that promotes unity by getting back to the source.

The Restoration ideal still works if we will work it. It offers a basis of unity to all who believe the Bible to be the Word of God. We are a unity movement, and that unity is based on Scripture.

We offer a plan of salvation that is scriptural. We believe that salvation is by grace; it is a gift from God and is the result of Jesus Christ dying on the cross to redeem us from sin. He was resurrected from the dead, he ascended to Heaven, and he is coming again.

And so salvation is a gift. It is by grace. It is something we must have but cannot accomplish on our own. Still, a gift must be received, or we do not possess the gift even though it is available. Therefore, because God loves us, he also teaches us that we are under a new covenant, and

the New Testament clearly articulates how people accept this gift: Those who became Christians heard the Word of God and believed it, they turned to God in repentance and confessed their faith in Jesus as their Savior. They were then baptized into Christ and were looked upon as redeemed and added to the church. (See Acts 2:36-47.)

The book of Acts goes to great length to give us story after story of people who were converted to Christ and added to the church. The pattern of conversion was always the same even though the experiences of the converts were often different.

We must teach salvation by grace, but we must also teach that, as individuals, we appropriate that grace by following the New Testament pattern. As is often said, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." We are all saved the same way.

But when we are added to the church, we are confronted by another New Testament concept. The local church is to be led by its own elders and deacons. In the New Testament, each church cooperated with other local churches, but no denominational form of government existed. This too is a great foundation for unity.

Embrace Our Mottoes

Our movement has been identified by some unusual mottoes from the past. "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine." "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak. Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." "In essentials unity, in opinions liberty, and in all things love." "Let Christian unity be our polar star." "We do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things with Bible names." "The New Testament is our only rule

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NAME BUT THE DIVINE.

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ALL THINGS LOVE.

LET CHRISTIAN UNITY BE OUR POLAR STAR.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS OUR ONLY RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST ON EARTH IS ESSENTIALLY, INTENTIONALLY, AND CONSTITUTIONALLY ONE.

WE DO BIBLE THINGS IN BIBLE WAYS AND CALL BIBLE THINGS WITH BIBLE NAMES.

NOT THE ONLY CHRISTIANS, BUT CHRISTIANS ONLY.

of faith and practice.” “The church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.” “Not the only Christians, but Christians only.”

I have heard them worded somewhat differently, but you see the point.

Today’s young people grasp the meaning of these mottoes and are seldom offended by them. We need to refer to them and display them.

Let’s never fail to communicate the biblical doctrines our movement has consistently professed. First, consider baptism, which is for a believer who has turned to Christ in repentance and willingly confesses Christ as Savior. It is immersion in water for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-5.)

Every denominational preacher I have talked to about baptism has admitted that the immersion of a believer into Christ for the remission of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit is right and scriptural. Therefore, let us continue to practice it the way everyone admits is right. This too is a basis for unity.

Then there is the Lord’s Supper, often referred to as the Communion service. This simple act of taking unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine in remembrance of the fact that Jesus died for our salvation

was the central act of first-century Christian worship. It was the way Jesus asked us to remember him. The New Testament proclaims that in observing this, “you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26)! When we take the Lord’s Supper, we preach a visual, practical sermon about the body and blood of Christ.

These two ordinances are essentials and can become another basis of unity when the clear teaching of Scripture is accepted.

We must be wary of legalism as it comes in many forms. It often appears when we try to make our opinions matters of faith. Legalism often adds to New Testament teaching in the same way the Jewish religious teachers added to the law of Moses during the time of Jesus on earth. Let us be careful not to attempt to force our opinions in nonessentials on others.

We are part of a great movement to get back to the source—the New Testament—and restore the church in its doctrines and structure. In doing so, we offer a basis of unity to a divided church world. Please pray that God will use us to remind the world of the Savior and the simple teachings concerning salvation and the church as taught in Scripture. Let us take advantage of what the Lord has given us and renew our purpose without apology.

Ben Merold serves as minister-at-large with Harvester Christian Church, St. Charles, Missouri. He and his wife, Pat, travel extensively as speakers for retreats, conventions, and seminars.

one that **UNDERSTANDS** where it stands

by Jerry Harris

Our fellowship of churches was forged in the same crucible as our nation. It began around 1800, at the same time the framers of our nation's freedom were capturing its genius on paper and in policy. When Isaac Errett, the first editor of *Christian Standard*, wrote "Our Position" in 1872, there was an incredible need to define in more succinct terms the soaring rhetoric of Barton W. Stone's "The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery", Thomas Campbell's "The Declaration and Address", and Alexander Campbell's "Sermon on the Law" which had so eloquently defined the position of a movement intent on the restoration of primitive Christianity. Errett wrote that we are free to identify those areas where we find ourselves in agreement with other evangelical churches, those areas where we agree with some but not all, and those areas where we are distinctive. While Errett's position was written in 5 parts, it concentrated in these 3 areas: complete agreement, partial agreement, and our distinctives.



Here were 18 areas of agreement with evangelicals that Errett listed:

1. The Divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Old and New Testaments.
2. The revelation of God as seen in the Trinity.
3. The all-sufficiency of the Bible.
4. The incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.
5. Jesus' life and teaching as a perfect example of divine character.
6. The death of Jesus as a perfect sin offering for redemption and forgiveness.
7. The bodily resurrection of Jesus and His immortality.
8. Jesus' ascension and present mediation on our behalf until all His enemies are subdued.
9. Jesus' supreme authority as Lord over all.
10. The personal and perpetual work of the Holy Spirit.
11. The alienation of the human race from God because of sin and their total dependence on Him.
12. The necessity of faith and repentance for salvation.
13. The ordinances of baptism and communion.
14. The obligation to recognize Sunday as the Lord's Day.
15. The acceptance that the Church is a divine institution.
16. The necessity of the pursuit of righteous living.
17. The fullness and freeness of salvation.
18. The final punishment of the ungodly.

These were areas of agreement with all who would have considered themselves as evangelical at the time. As I scan through the belief statements on evangelical websites, the same can be said today. In this sense, there is a great deal of unity between us all.

There were also 5 areas of some commonality with other evangelicals:


1. The New Testament mode of baptism was always immersion only.
2. Baptism was an individual decision and not for infants.
3. The church began at Pentecost, not under John the Baptist's teaching.
4. There should be no distinction between clergy and laity.
5. Sectarianism is sin and we should seek to be unified.

While many evangelical churches would describe their belief and practice as different than these, there are many who do, and in these we find even a larger degree of unity.

Under union, Errett described its reality and necessity in 10 ways.

1. Union is something we must desire.
2. We must hold union loosely.
3. A desire for division or sectarianism is sin and should be avoided.
4. We have only one basis for unity...that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
5. All other tests of fellowship must be abandoned.
6. That there should be no distinction between clergy and laity.
7. In areas of biblical liberty, the law of love should lead us.
8. In areas of biblical inference, we should seek unity but never force our conviction on others.
9. In business matters, the majority should rule.
10. Where we are free, no one should judge someone else.

The idea of unity and the basis for it rested at the core of restoration principals. It was something to be contended for while holding firm to the distinctives that made us who we are. The dynamic tension between truth and grace is seen here...on the one hand, an unwavering commitment to rightly dividing the word of truth, and on the other, a committed motivation to honor the divine directive of unity.



There were many churches in 1872 that could line up with this position, but it was in this third group of 9 where Errett defined the distinctives of the Restoration Movement of his day.

1. We believe that while both the Old and New Testaments are Divinely and Inerrantly inspired by God and that the Old Testament provides invaluable lessons and understanding to the New, we believe that the New Testament alone is our rule of authority, faith, and practice.
2. We refuse to attempt to define or explain the Trinity as it is beyond human reason and only insist on the descriptive words of scripture.
3. We repudiate all human and man-made creeds and see the New Testament in totality as our only rule of faith and practice. Where it has not bound us, we are free to stand in that liberty.
4. We see Jesus, His Divinity and Christhood as the central truth of the Christian system. All who trust in Him as the Christ, the Son of God are part of our spiritual family.
5. We repudiate any spiritual exercise that excludes the Word of God as central to conversion and regeneration as our faith comes by hearing and responding to it.
6. We submit no other tests for baptism other than faith and repentance.
7. We insist on the meaning of baptism as defined in the New Testament and surrender to its biblical definition. We also regard the Lord's Supper as a sweet and holy feast of precious memory within the framework of our spiritual family that we observe as a regular part of our worship.
8. We recognize Sunday as the Lord's Day as a New Testament apostolic example.
9. We believe the church is a Divine institution and renounce all party, denominational, or sectarian names.

The need to understand who we are is as critical today as it was in 1872. We need a clear understanding of our position, especially in leadership, as it is critical to this movement's forward progress. In many ways, evangelicals have gravitated in our direction. Some of the motivation of this certainly comes from our numerical success. But numbers without well understood convictions is sandy ground. As I review the 9 distinctives that Errett laid out in his "Our Position", I find myself in the same sweet harmony with them. Today, we live in the results of that American experiment, and those who identify with this fellowship of churches live in the bountiful blessings of our movement's pioneers. Their vision and desire for unity on these basic beliefs didn't come cheap but they were on to something great . . . something special. It's time to embrace it again.

Jerry Harris is publisher of Christian Standard Media and senior pastor of The Crossing, a multisite church located in three states across the Midwest.

one that is **INDEPENDENT & CONNECTED**

by Jeff Faull

WE WANT TO BE...WHERE TRUTH & LOVE MEET

The psalmist articulates the union of truth and love beautifully: “Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10, *New American Standard Bible*).

The union of truth and love has too often been presented as a simple balance or a mixture; for example, “She’s a little too high on the truth scale,” or conversely, “She puts too much emphasis on love.” However, you can’t have too much love and you can’t have too much truth. Truth doesn’t need a little falsehood to soften it, nor does love need a little hate to toughen it.

Truth and love are not opposites. They are not mutually exclusive. You can apply or demonstrate either of them incorrectly. Certain demonstrations of love or truth aren’t appropriate for the time and place, but there is never too much of either. Both are eternal. Both are the essence of God. Both are integral to the other’s definition. When we speak the truth in love, we are most faithful to our own plea. Let there be no doubt that learning the union of truth and love is at the heart of restoration.

WHERE AUTONOMY & ACCOUNTABILITY COOPERATE

One of the most beneficial characteristics of our DNA is congregational autonomy. We employ a plurality of local leaders who guide, shepherd, and strategize in faithfulness to the charge given them by God. No outside interference or mandatory, man-made, external structures and controls should hinder our quest. However, that great design can be corrupted when isolation and insulation become the standard way of operating. When congregations and leaders network, fellowship, and learn from each other’s successes and failures, and when we cooperate for kingdom advances, an environment for true restoration of New Testament Christianity can occur.

WHERE ANCIENT PATHS & PRESENT CULTURE ENGAGE CORRECTLY

The “ancient paths” mentality of Jeremiah 6:16 remains a foundation for Restoration principles. Jeremiah wrote, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it.” When we insist that the eternal wisdom and plan of God is never archaic or outdated, and yet we fearlessly engage with the realities of our contemporary society, we can find optimum relevance and effectiveness in engaging our culture. When those two worlds are bridged, without compromise, the church shines.

WHERE THEOLOGY & MISSION MERGE

We tend to think of purists and pragmatists as inhabiting opposite ends of the spectrum. That can be an accurate assessment. But real restoration of New Testament Christianity begins with the realization that ministry and mission are the outworking of our theology. From the Greatest Commandment to the Great Confession to the Great Commission, our professions and practices must align and be consistent to help us become the great congregations God intended.

Jeff Faull has served as senior minister with Mount Gilead Church, Mooresville, Indiana, since 1988.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH IS THIS?

one
that
finds
UNITY
irresistible

by Tyler McKenzie

I love the principles of the Restoration Movement. I was raised in one of our churches, educated at one of our schools, and lead one of our churches.

But the most compelling principle to me has always been our commitment to live in the tension between truth and unity. Perhaps it's time to call for a restoration of that ideal in our movement, because I believe we are out of balance.

From what I read in the New Testament, unity was an undeniable essential for the earliest church. Here are four principles that I hope will move us in the right direction:

humility —

The calling card of the humblest people I know is a willingness to listen. Listening generates empathy and understanding, the key ingredients for peaceful disagreement. It's saying to your counterpart, "You talk first." Through listening, we earn the right to be heard. Listening is acknowledging that no one has all the answers.

I'm not suggesting humble people are passive or lack confidence. In fact, passivity often is just a different form of pride. The student who fears raising his hand to answer a question is just as prideful as the one who always raises his hand. Both are self-absorbed. Both care too much about how their peers see them. Humility isn't about having high self-esteem or low self-esteem. Humility is having no self-esteem, but rather esteeming Christ alone. If you esteem the One who gave his life for his enemies, you will certainly be willing to listen to your fellow Christians.

accommodation —

By its very nature, unity demands joining with people whose views differ from yours, and yes, that is possible to do. It requires making a calculated decision to prioritize common ground over personal opinion, mission over method, Jesus over generational difference. It's much like the accommodation Paul described in 1 Corinthians 9:22 when he said, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (*English Standard Version*). It's the kind of unity James articulated in his letter to Gentile Christians when he asked them to "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled" (Acts 15:29), so they might be in fellowship with Jewish Christians.

truth —

Unity is not *uniformity*, but it can cultivate it when we lead with humble listening and accommodation. The trick here is sharing the truth in love. We need both in equal measure. Love without truth isn't love at all. It's enablement. Truth without love will never be heard because it's self-righteous. But when we balance both truth and love, suddenly we find ourselves on common ground with a common goal. Suddenly we find ourselves fighting like family rather than enemies.

These first three principles all point to the final one . . .

cross-shaped love—

This is the cruciform love Jesus selflessly embodied and which we bear when we choose to carry our own cross.

I don't know if you have ever experienced that sort of radical, selfless, cruciform love in your life, but I did, and its effects were supernatural. I think cross-shaped love either repels others or transforms them. You either run from that love and resent it because it's just so strange, or you can't help but reciprocate it.

God will bless unity. Jesus told us this much in John 17:21: "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (*New Living Translation*). Jesus said our unity should be so different that it seems divine. It should be so irregular, it's irresistible.

Perhaps this is the greatest apologetic the American church today has to offer in the United—or, maybe more accurately, the Divided—States of America. Perhaps this is our greatest evangelistic tool. I can't help but think in a country so clearly divided along political lines, in a day when families and marriages are failing more than ever, in a culture where racial tensions are high, in a time when the old have lost hope in the young and the young have lost respect for the old . . . I can't help but think we have an opportunity. We have an opportunity to shine the countercultural light of unity and give the watching world a glimpse of the presence of God and reconciling power of the gospel.

How irresistible would it be to see all races, colors, and cultures worshipping together? How strange would it be to see Democrats

and Republicans praying together? How awe-inspiring might it be to see a community where the young heed the wisdom of the old and the old encourage the young? Would people not notice if our marriages never dissolved? Would they not wonder about a group that is "one"?

Our Trinitarian God is One because of his commitment to unity. His essence could not be love without his commitment to selfless unity. And so, let it be with us! We know we cannot always be right, but we can unite. We know we cannot always win, but we can be one. And oneness will evoke wonder in this divided day.

Tyler McKenzie serves as lead pastor with Northeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky. He is the husband of Lindsay and father to Palmer.

one that wants to be RESTORED

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

ACTS 2:42-47 (NIV84)

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