

RESTORING FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

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It is possible to restore to the present world first-century Christianity! That's right! But why would we want to? Why should we restore first-century Christianity to the present world? Isn't the Christianity we currently see in the world enough?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

The Christianity that most people see in this world is only a distortion of first-century Christianity. What most people see is the in-fighting among believers in Jesus Christ. The world sees a divided Christ. It is no wonder that many people do not believe in the power or the saviorhood of Jesus Christ.

Some parts of the world still remember the trouble that so-called "Christian" governments and "Christian" churches have caused. There are people who say that "Christians" are responsible for 2000 years of tyranny and violence. And so these critics list a few of the atrocities of the centuries and lay them at the feet of Christianity. They remember the crusades; they remember the "church's" persecution of free-thinkers like Galileo and Copernicus. They even bring up the American Ku Klux Klan as an example of "Christian terrorism." They evidently believe that just because someone's symbol is a burning cross that it means they are "Christians." I suppose they think that everyone who says he is a Christian, or who wears a crucifix is a Christian!

Is this true Christianity? Are these examples of first-century Christianity? No! These are examples of hypocrisy. These are examples of apostate religion, a religion that disguises itself as the religion of Jesus Christ. The climate that caused these events, and a hundred more like them, are actually predicted by the first century apostles of Christ. That's right!

Jesus' apostle Paul foresaw a time when a great perversion would sweep over the church and the world. He called it a "rebellion" led by someone Paul called "the son of destruction", "the man of lawlessness." Paul wrote this prediction to some Christians who were expecting Jesus to return to the earth in just a few days. But Paul assured them that Jesus' return was NOT near. The "rebellion" would come first, before the Lord Jesus returned to the earth. Paul wrote:

"Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day [the return of Jesus] will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." Then Paul continued, "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (Did you hear that? The lawless one will still be in the world when Jesus returns!) Paul continues: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.... So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word." [2 Thessalonians 2:1-17](#)

Paul's statement is a clear prediction that trouble was coming in the name of religion. Paul also wrote of the future to the young preacher Timothy telling him this: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." ([2 Timothy 4:1-4 ESV](#)) Jesus' apostle Paul also told Timothy: "In the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." ([2 Timothy 3:1-5 ESV](#)) Paul was not the only apostle to see the future of the church.

Jesus' apostle Peter also made some similar predictions when he wrote, "I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder...And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

[\(2 Peter 1:13-2:3 ESV\)](#)

Paul and Peter predict the great apostasy that would infiltrate the church of Christ. These men claimed that their insight into the future was from God's Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.... If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." [\(1 Timothy 4:1-8 ESV\)](#)

God's Holy Spirit was informing these apostles of times future to them. Those days did come. The result was a perversion of Christianity. The result was a

distortion of the truth as taught by our Lord Jesus and His apostles. However, in every generation since the founding of Jesus' church there have been those people who have uncovered and rediscovered the church of the first century. They did this by reading about the first-century faith found in the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

When people discover the New Testament teaching it is an invigorating experience! The knowledge of first-century Christianity enlightens us to the possibilities of the church of Jesus Christ as He wants it! When you go back to the first century through the pages of Jesus' New Testament you leap centuries of false teaching, false practice, and false hope. When you take your Christianity from the pages of the New Testament you discover a completely different lifestyle than the stale reproductions that you see in the world around you! Yes! It is possible to restore to your life New Testament first-century Christianity! Happy are the people who experience it and demonstrate it to the world.

These common believers are simple people. Generally speaking, they do not walk the halls of the high and mighty. They do not have political aspirations. They do not wage war. You will NOT find them among the temples of the high church. You will find them seasoning with grace the relationships of their private lives. You will find them raising their children in the nurture and the admonitions of the Lord. You will find them walking the public streets looking for opportunities to do good. Yes, you will also find them struggling to allow Christ to have His way with them, for they too are flesh. But you will find them being led by the Spirit of Christ. You will know them by their fruits, by their grace, by their faith, and by their love. You will also know them by their stubbornness, by their unwillingness to give in to sin, and by their defense of the teachings of Christ. They are patient people, humble people, gracious people, and peaceable people. Jesus calls them "the salt of the earth", "the light of the world" and "the children of God." Fellow Christians call them "brothers and sisters."

These believers in Christ sadly acknowledge what apostate religion has done. These New Testament Christians know what apostasy looks like, and so they call for the restoration of the New Testament church in every community. They do not call for reformation! That's right! To reform an apostate church is simply to give it a new dress; it doesn't change the soul. On the other hand, to restore the

New Testament church is to leap over the myths and schemes of the devil and eventually to stand in the truth of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament Jesus' people are known as disciples (Acts 6:7, et.al.), followers (Ephesians 5:1), believers in Christ (Acts 5:14, et.al), and Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Those Christians were not known as Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Mormons, Pentecostals, or Lutherans. Neither were they known as male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. They were Christians, of every race and of every nation. They believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. And believing and living that faith they were "waiting for that blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." ([Titus 2:13-14 ESV](#))

Friends, you can help restore the church of the first century! You can be just a Christian. Churches of Christ are finding good progress in restoring first-century Christianity to this present world. We invite you to come and be a participant in restoring New Testament Christianity to the world.

Visit a church of Christ near you, become a member of it, and help restore New Testament Christianity to the world.