

APPENDICES

1: Understanding Our Times

"When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." - Matthew 16:2,3.

"Love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." - Romans 13:10,11.

The people of Jesus' time could predict the weather but missed the greatest event in history, the coming of God's Son to the earth.

We too know when to take an umbrella to work, when to buy and sell, when to trade cars, how to choose a career with a future. But do we know what is happening spiritually and what we should be doing about it? (The roots of most human problems are spiritual. So are the secrets of life and happiness.)

We enjoy our warm, comforting church fellowship, are preoccupied with issues less than fundamental, and may not even know that we are in a real spiritual war between good and evil. Jesus said the people of this world are more shrewd than the people of the light.

Worldlings watch the times and know how to prepare, even to use what is coming. *What signs of our times should we be responding to?*

1. The Growth of Moral Evil

Evil keeps accelerating and we haven't seen anything yet. Where will this take our nation? (Freedom is based on moral self-control and cannot continue without it.) How will the growth of evil affect the church and Christians? Already many resent the church for its message. Temptation increases. How do we protect our children, our families, our churches? Our kids must know more than right forms and rules if they are going to make it. They must know and love God. Above all we parents must be real. Our children know our priorities, what we will give up everything else for.

2. Pluralism and a Post-Christian Society

Our country is no longer united around Judeo-Christian values. We must coexist with strong elements that are non-Christian and even anti-Christian. How do we adjust to this? Do we home school or put our kids and teachers in Christian schools, taking even more Christian influence from public education? Do we leave our children in public schools at great moral, spiritual and even physical risk? Do we move someplace where Christian influence is still strong? Where can you hide?

Do we become activists, lobbying, picketing, boycotting, using politics and worldly means to turn back the clock? Can it be turned back that way? In a free society we do need to be heard, to influence the direction of our country. But efforts on a worldly level, as valuable as they are, only go so far. They may even create backlash and hinder

communication between believers and non-believers. And though we need righteous laws, more laws and more policemen are only a band-aid.

There is no lasting cure until enough individual hearts are changed through the gospel. We were once a Christian nation because enough people feared God and revered Christ. Things changed because we Christians dropped the ball. How different America would be today if the gospel had not been undermined by our unjustified divisions, hypocrisy and dead formalism. Today our priorities must be prayer and spreading the salt of the gospel, backed up by sincere lives which the enemy cannot accuse (1 Peter 2:12-15).

3. A Rapidly Changing World

We assume that life will always be as safe and secure as it is now. Actually our present advantages are abnormal for most of history and much of the world. There has been dizzying political, social, economic and technological change--more in the last ten years than in decades or even centuries before. We have moved from the industrial age to the information age, from rationalism and modernism to post-modern thinking.

Many conflicts have flared up which were once contained by Soviet power. We don't know how to stop some of them. Nuclear, chemical and biological know-how is spreading to small nations who could hold us hostage by sneaking one nuclear device or one virus into a major city. Islamic terrorists target our facilities. The FBI cannot catch them all in time. Our own extremist groups are an equal or greater threat.

Our economic system could easily self-destruct under pressure from the national debt or more terrorist attacks or some other country's collapse. The population explosion is a ticking bomb, not to mention threats from global pollution and the depletion of resources. There is a rise of neo-paganism. Future persecution of Christians is possible.

Obviously God must become our security. Our faith in him has to become real enough to give us peace and strength. The good news is that when times are less secure, more people see their need for God and respond to the gospel.

4. Crime, Drugs, Teen Pregnancy

Such problems are more likely to bury America than Russia ever was. It is amusing and yet tragic to hear experts debate the solutions, with little discernment of the real spiritual causes. We thank God for better enforcement and social programs, as far as they go. We should support wise efforts. But family breakdown, oppression, racism, substance abuse, dishonesty and corruption are spiritual problems at their root. More and more thinking people, even officials, are realizing this.

There is a good side to the growth of evil: evil is seen more clearly for what it is. Sin fools us by looking good and desirable. The more openly sin operates, the less it can hide its end results. A new convert recently said, "I have lived in sin and I know it was going to destroy me. I can never go back to that life!" Seeing sin's real nature, people realize how much they need the help of God and his Spirit. They become open to the gospel. Are we awake and poised to connect with them and to minister?

The growth of evil and opposition also forces Christians to unite for strength. Should outright persecution begin, we will be very thankful for everyone who honors the lordship of Christ. We will be less prone to divide over non-essentials.

5. Denominationalism is Dying

More congregations are dropping their denominational brand names. When young people move to a new place, they look more for a church that meets their spiritual needs than for the brand their parents attended. There is new interest in the model of the early church. More churches are choosing to be led by elders. There is renewed appreciation for the importance of baptism. Even among Catholics, there is a movement toward baptism by immersion. Their new buildings are built to include a full-sized baptistry.

Many people are showing a hunger for solid Biblical teaching about church, family and Christian living. For those of springing from the Restoration Movement, there could hardly be a more exciting and opportune time. The early founders of our movement believed that unity could really happen if believers would renounce the authority of differing, divisive human creeds, look together to scriptural authority, and unite on Biblical fundamentals while allowing freedom to differ on matters of opinion and human interpretation. Our movement lost hold of those ideals, forming our own authoritative unwritten creeds and dividing over many secondary issues of human opinion. Were we to return to our early ideals, how timely our message would be!

6. A Generation that Critically Questions

An older teacher recently said, “My generation was the last generation that could simply be indoctrinated.” The present generation is better-educated and is trained to challenge authority, to question before accepting. But this has a good side. Faith based on careful investigation will last better. And the Christian faith can stand the test. Also, people who question and abandon false systems may be more reachable with saving truth.

7. Entering a New Millennium

We are barely into a new millennium. At such times people become much more thoughtful about who we are and where we are going. We evaluate the past and are concerned about the future. People feel more need of spiritual guidance.

Summing up, the growth of evil, increasing insecurity, the decline of denominationalism, increased interest in the Bible, inquiring minds and the turning of a millennial page—all of these make people more receptive to the gospel of Christ. We could focus on the fears of the unknown, but it is better to think on the opportunities ahead. Under conditions much like ours today, the early church turned the world upside down.

This is an exciting time to be alive, serving Jesus. We have the greatest opportunity in 200 years. But to seize the opportunity, we must do certain things:

1. Avoid legalism and really accept the Bible’s teaching on grace.
2. Be careful of all of God’s word, not just selected topics, and be careful of inward righteousness.
3. Leave to God the judgments that belong to him alone.
4. Center on Christ, the cross and the true fundamentals named in scripture.
5. Realize that while we disagree on many secondary matters, scripture allows us (and requires us) to work together. We will answer if we don’t.

6. Recognize that division itself is a sin which undermines the gospel – John 17.
7. Bear the burden of the weak rather than pleasing ourselves (Romans 15:1-3). We must put communication with the lost ahead of our traditional comfort, “becoming all things to all people” to win as many as possible. (This is the spirit of the cross.)
8. Study the post-modern mind and learn to communicate with it.
9. Hate sin but love the sinner and be sure that he or she feels our love.
- 10 Live careful, holy lives that back up what we teach.

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. – Ephesians 5:15-17

I hope you are awake, understanding the times. I hope you are concerned about the things God is concerned about. I hope you do everything in your power to count for Jesus. I hope you are not compromising but living a holy life that radiates Christ and draws those hungry for righteousness. I hope you are growing so you can meet whatever is coming and lead your loved ones safely through.

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2: Answering the Unbeliever

A recent E-mail describes correspondence between an unnamed Christian viewer and ABC-TV. Reportedly The Christian wrote:

"ABC is obsessed (or should I say abscessed) with the subject of homosexuality. I will no longer watch any of your attempts to convince the world that homosexuality is OK. 'The Practice' can be a fairly good show but last night's program was so typical of your agenda. You picked the 'dufus' of the office to be the one who was against the idea of his mother being gay and made him look like a whiner because he had convictions. This type of mentality calls people like me 'gay basher.' Read the first chapter of Romans (that's in the Bible) and see what the apostle Paul had to say about it...He and God and Jesus were all 'gay bashers.' What if she'd fallen in love with her cocker spaniel...is that an alternative lifestyle? (By the way...the Bible speaks against that, too.)"

Reportedly ABC's Webmaster responded: "How about getting your nose out of the Bible (which is ONLY a book of stories compiled by MANY different writers hundreds of years ago) and read the Declaration of Independence (what our nation is built on) where it says "All Men are Created Equal" -- and try treating them that way for a change!? Or better yet, try thinking for yourself and stop using an archaic book of stories as your crutch for your existence."

Commendably, Brother Edward Fudge checked with ABC about the authenticity of the Webmaster's reply. ABC apologized, saying the representative inappropriately expressed his personal views in response to a viewer's comments and no longer works for the company.

I recount the above merely to illustrate the difficulty we Christians have these days communicating with unbelievers in a way that honors Christ.

To Christians living in a pagan culture which was often hostile, Peter wrote, "*...even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed...But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*" -- 1 Peter 3:15

We must give our Christian people the help they need to deal with a culture increasingly critical and even sometimes hostile to Christianity. Two generations ago most of our culture was sympathetic to our Christian viewpoint and to our moral standards. Even those who broke them knew the standards were right. Now more and more people do not identify with those standards. We are living in a post-Christian, a partially neo-pagan culture. Moral standards are rapidly changing as people push the boundaries. We sometimes find it difficult in the work environment. We grieve at what is done in the neighborhood; we fear for what our children face in the schools. We find ourselves resenting the changes to what was a Christian culture.

But in the end, we Christians have to accept much of the responsibility. We are the salt and the light. We were entrusted with the gospel. If we had taken our faith more seriously...If there had been less hypocrisy...If there had been less division...If there had been more concern for inward change and holiness... And we had all the advantage in the earlier generations in our country, yet we dropped the ball.

In any case, life is more difficult with the growth of evil. Scripture talks about the difficulty of living as children of light in a dark world. In Sodom, Lot was *"distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men... tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard"* - 2 Peter 2:7,8. Daniel and his friends, kidnapped into Babylonian culture, had to decide whether they would risk even their lives to live like God's people. Joseph faced the same challenge as a slave in Egypt. After Naaman the Leper believed in the living God, he prayed that God would forgive him for the times he had to escort his king to the idol temple.

Some of the victims of the Littleton massacre were singled out because they were strong Christian believers. Cassie Burnall chose to die rather than deny her faith in Christ. Jesus said to his chosen apostles, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves...Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* He warned them of the persecution and false accusation they would suffer. But he promised that the Spirit would always help them with their answers - Matthew 10:16-20. *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first"* - 1 John 15:18-20. The letter of 1 Peter was written to advise Christians living as a minority under persecution and slander.

What do the scriptures tell us about living in an increasingly pagan, hostile society?

1. Keep your moral difference, a clear separation from evil. Let your life be marked by good and by right.

"Do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret" - Ephesians 5:7-12.

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?...Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" - 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

This does not mean retreating into a fortress mentality or monastic isolation. Joseph Aldrich in *Lifestyle Evangelism* points out that because Jesus was radically different in his mind and life, it was safe for him to be radically involved with needy sinners. Even if we don't go into a monastery, we sometimes do so mentally, shutting out people we should be interacting with redemptively. If we only think of the world as "us against them," much needed communication and influence is lost. God may have put us among unbelievers and critics for a reason.

Though today's world is more hostile, there are many people who really want to hear a Christian message that has integrity. God wants us to be among them, being real and talking in a way that cannot be condemned - Titus 2:7,8. *Times of social and moral confusion are times of greatest receptivity to the gospel.*

2. Entrust your lives to God. Peter taught persecuted Christians to respond as Jesus did when he was surrounded by the wicked: *"Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* - 1 Peter 2:21-15

We renounce our lives at the time of conversion. We are crucified with Christ. We are to accept that in a world enslaved to sin, people serious about righteousness will suffer. If our faith is true, it is worth suffering for, dying for. Christ can bring us and our children and our loved ones through. If we suffer or even die, it is not the end but the beginning for us.

3. God has not authorized Christians to physically destroy the wicked.

Some people, outraged at how pornographers and abortionists and drug dealers are destroying lives, want to resort to the world's methods and blow the evildoers away. But Jesus told a parable about a farmer who sowed good seed in his field. Unexpectedly weeds, planted by an enemy, began to grow up among the wheat. The workers thought to go out and pull up the weeds, but the farmer replied, *"No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them"* - Matthew 13:24-30. They might have killed a Saul of Tarsus, whom God would someday use to evangelize the nations.

Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight..."* - John 18:36. The enemy is not people but the spiritual evil that has taken them captive - Eph 6:12. So we don't bomb abortion clinics or shoot pornographers. Our weapon is the truth of God which enters and changes hearts. That's where the root of evil is, in man's sinful nature. Only the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit can change our world.

4. Respect people's freedom of choice. We should respectfully, at the appropriate times, point out what sin is. But the Bible does not give us the right to force our beliefs and preferences on people who don't agree. It is not Christlike to wave our beliefs in people's faces or cram them down their throats. Surely we would not identify with some medieval commanders who marched pagan captives down to the river and forcibly baptized them. Someday we will all reap the consequences our choices, but even God left Adam and Eve free to choose. The system that gives us the right to follow Jesus gives others the right not to. While we may grieve over choices people make, we must respect their personhood. *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* - 2 Corinthians 3:17. And using political and economic pressure to change things morally is a double-edged sword that may hurt us at least as much as it helps us. It never brings permanent change and it may close people's minds to the gentle but powerful light of Jesus in us. Forcing people in school or workplace to listen to our Christian pronouncements is just as counterproductive.

5. Live such a model life that the critic will be seen as false.

"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men...For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men...Show proper respect to everyone..." - 1 Peter 2:11-17.

As part of this we must avoid unnecessary religious divisions. Division and fighting among Christians deny the gospel we preach. They give unbelievers grounds to discount us and undermine our message. And we must remove hypocrisy, the thing that makes us ugliest. To people who strictly taught others but violated their own teaching, Paul said, *"God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you"* - Romans 2:21-24. We should regret more than anything talk or behavior that brings disrespect and slander

against God and his word - 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:4,5. Paul taught slaves to serve their masters so faithfully that they would *"make the teaching about God our Savior attractive"* - Titus 2:9,10.

If your life is ugly and distasteful, let it be so only to those who hate righteousness. Our life will always be offensive to someone; just be sure it is to the right people. To the unbelieving world we are the *"smell of death,"* but to those who are being saved we are the *"fragrance of life"* - 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

6. Be very careful how you answer the unbeliever or the critic.

Make sure of your facts before answering! For years well-meaning Christians have been made to look foolish by answering phony alarms like the famous O'Hair petition to stop religious broadcasting. Paul teaches us to avoid *"evil suspicions"* which have no evidence - 1 Timothy 6:4. But where evil is real, we are to *"expose"* [reprove] the deeds of darkness - Eph 5:11

The problem is knowing how to do so in a way that does not cause more harm than good. Some employees push preaching down the throats of workmates until they make themselves odious and close every mind. We are not to appoint ourselves the moral policeman of the universe - 1 Corinthians 5:12,13.

We may have much truth and yet have such an obnoxious, arrogant attitude that we make people hate our message. Humility and fairness, on the other hand, are always attractive. We should also look for the good things that do exist in the lives of unbelievers. Many of us grieved over the release of the blasphemous film "The Last Temptation of Christ." A Christian who worked in the film company tells of riding back and forth to work with other workers in a car which had to pass through lines of Christian demonstrators carrying rude placards and calling out insults. One of his companions turned to him and said, "If I didn't know you, I would hate those people." Arrogance or rudeness is *always* off limits for a Christian. If all that matters is dumping on people, it doesn't matter how we say things. But if redemptive communication is important, it matters very much. If we care, the Holy Spirit will help us learn to speak in a Christlike spirit.

Scripture gives advice about how to speak to unbelievers and critics of Christianity:

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" - Colossians 4:5,6. *"In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience..."* - 1 Peter 3:15,16a.

There is an art to *"speaking the truth in love"* - Eph 4:15. "God so loved the world...." So must we.

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3: Restoring the Unity of All Christian Believers through a Return to the Authority of the Scriptures Alone

Jesus prayed that his followers might be one so that the world might believe in Him - John 17:20,21. The progress of God's kingdom has probably suffered more damage from division among Christians than from anything else. And Satan's kingdom has probably gained the most from our divisions. If we have the heart of our Master, we will long for unity with other believers and will work for it at every opportunity. In today's world, as denominationalism wanes and hunger grows for a return to basics, the story below should have a fresh appeal.

How can all believers in Christ become one? Around 1800 in Britain and America, there appeared a number of teachers from various church backgrounds who were grieved at all the division and competition between believers, and who wanted to unite all believers by returning to the one authority of the scriptures for the faith and practice of the church. There were Abner Jones and John Wright of the Baptists; James O'Kelley of the Methodists; and Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander Campbell of the Presbyterians. Each one of these had separately been saddened by the doctrinal conflicts and the divisions among followers of Christ. And each saw a return to the authority of the scriptures as a way to unite believers of various backgrounds.

Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were the best known leaders in the effort at that time to restore scriptural beliefs and practices. Thomas Campbell went to America from Scotland. He was a pastor in the Presbyterian Church, and in the new country he was accepted by the Presbyterians and given charge of some local churches among whom he would ride circuit. Campbell was disturbed to find that even within the Presbyterian Church there were parties and divisions. Those of one party would not offer communion to those of a different party even though they were all Presbyterians. And in every town there were groups wearing different names and wasting their strength contending with each other, strength that could have been applied to saving the lost if the churches had been united.

When Campbell wanted to offer communion to those of another party within the Presbyterian Church, he was condemned by church authorities. Later he decided to drop the name "Presbyterian" and just serve God as a Christian without adding a distinctive denominational name. He began to realize that the various humanly-devised names and creeds only strengthened the walls of separation between groups of Christ's followers. He determined to base his work on the authority of scripture alone, and he began to appeal to those in various churches to lay down their conflicting, humanly devised traditions and unite in looking to the scriptures for direction. He had no intention of starting a new church. He just wanted the churches to reform by abandoning their accumulated human traditions and uniting on the common ground of original apostolic teaching and practice.

After Thomas went to America, Alexander, his son, remained in Scotland for a time together with his mother and the other children. During this period Alexander studied at university. He noticed, as his father had, that there were divisions within the Presbyterian Church over minor matters, and that members of one division would not allow those of another division to take communion with them. He also became aware that the organization of the Presbyterian Church differed in ways from that he saw in the scriptures. Soon Alexander and the rest of the family moved to America to join Thomas.

There Alexander began to help his father in the work of pleading for unity based on scripture.

Thomas and Alexander saw that the Bible is the same for all the churches, but that the creeds are different. They saw that the humanly-written creeds and catechisms of the various churches all conflicted with each other and served as walls to preserve division and make unity impossible. Division comes not from the one Bible but from the conflicting creeds. Each church was not satisfied to be led by the Bible alone, but had to have its own additional authoritative book embodying its own rules of faith and its own traditions. Because of these extra written authorities which conflicted each other, the churches were unable to work together or to give communion to each other's members. Each church was in favor of unity if the other churches would leave their creeds and accept its creed. And things could not get better as long as each church insisted on holding to its own creed as authority.

Thomas Campbell began to suggest that believers do away with all humanly-written creeds and come back to the scriptures, which are accepted by all, as a basis for authority and unity. He proposed that people should not do anything in the church just because their former leaders had done it, but that we should study the scriptures afresh and do everything we do because of scriptural authority.

As they continued to study the scriptures, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, their families and some of those studying with them were baptized by immersion. They realized that their previous baptism by sprinkling did not measure up to the baptism in scripture, and that sprinkling was a human tradition that had grown up since the time of the apostles. They also stopped looking at any earthly place or council as the government or general headquarters of the church, because they saw that in the scriptures every local church had its own independent elders under the authority of Christ. They stopped baptizing infants and small children because they could find no authority or example for this in the scriptures. They began to keep the Lord's Supper in memory of Christ's death every week on the first day of the week as they saw what the early church had done. They continued to learn and follow the more of the doctrines and practices of the New Testament church, and abandoned doctrines and practices which they believed had been added by human authority in later generations. Later the Campbells joined efforts with Walter Scott and Barton W. Stone who were also working for unity on the basis of scripture.

The number of people who believed in these principles grew and congregations sprang up. The same kind of thing was happening in Great Britain. The movement as a whole came to be known as the "Restoration Movement." The leaders of the movement had not intended to start yet another church. They simply wanted all groups to unite as the body of Christ on the basis of scripture. But although many people accepted this plea, the majority in most churches rejected it, and the "reformers" or "restorers" and their adherents had to carry on as a group. In both Britain and America the people of the movement were simply called "Christians", and a local congregation would be called a "Church of Christ," "Christian Church," or "Disciples of Christ." By these names they did not mean that they alone were Christ's people. They were not trying to sit in God's place and judge the eternal destiny of other believers. Rather, they believed that as the church belongs to Christ, it should honor him by wearing his name, just as a bride wears her husband's name. They did not want a name which did not come from scripture, and they believed that distinctive human names only emphasize the divisions that exist.

This Restoration Movement fell woefully short of its ideals. There was a major division in its ranks in about 1900 over the questions of instrumental music in worship and the formation of a missionary society. Other subdivisions followed as the churches lost sight of the original ideals. Some in the liberal wing of the movement lost much of their respect for the authority of scripture. Conservatives got lost in other directions. As needed as they are at times, reform/restoration efforts always have two risks built into them: In their concern over New Testament procedure and practice, they may neglect Biblical teaching about inward spiritual transformation (upon which unity also depends). And they may tend toward legalism, the belief that God accepts us because of our attainment of legal correctness rather than because of God's free grace in the cross of Christ. The Restoration Movement has often fallen into both traps. Even where the Movement has been at its best, perfect restoration of the New Testament doctrine, practice and spirit has not been achieved. It is an on-going task. Still this writer believes that the "Restoration Principle" remains valid and compellingly necessary, that is, the abandonment of conflicting human traditions and the uniting of all believers on the authority of the scriptures alone. No one can condemn this principle. In spite of its failings, the Restoration Movement has preached a valuable and needed message about the authority of scripture, and it has produced many wonderful servants of God.

The church should be ruled by the scriptures alone in faith and practice, because:

- 1) Traditions and doctrines added by humans divide Christians - Romans 16:17.
- 2) Christians are to obey the word of Christ their Lord and are to do his will as revealed in the Bible. They have no authority to change what the Lord or his apostles have commanded. Those who love Christ should want to please him by carefully submitting to his word - John 14:21,23; Luke 6:46.
- 3) God is not pleased with our prayers when we substitute the traditions of men for the commandments of God - Matthew 15:8,9.
- 4) We cannot find any other wisdom as good as the wisdom of the Holy Spirit expressed in apostolic commands and examples in the early church.

The early Restoration leaders were very concerned about unity. It is a Biblical subject. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul lists seven doctrinal truths which must be held in common by all churches and Christians if they are to have the "unity of the Spirit" in Christ. He mentions one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. This is the *doctrinal* platform for unity.

But doctrinal agreement alone will not unite Christians. Earlier in the same unity passage, Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul tells us the kind of heart that Christians must have in order to preserve unity. This is the *spiritual* platform for unity. He mentions lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearance in love. Unity is of the Spirit, according to Paul, and the qualities listed here are the fruit of the Spirit - Galatians 5:22,23. Paul elsewhere also teaches that Christians must not judge each other or divide over secondary, more disputable issues about Bible teaching, but leave those judgments up to God and work together in unity - Romans 14:1-15:7. Division over such things is itself a disobedience of scripture. The Bible teaches that is the core, fundamental truths of the faith which unite us, not uniformity on secondary, disputable matters. And much religious division does not come from doctrinal disagreement but from a self-serving, carnal spirit - Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 16:17,18. Many times doctrinal problems simply provide a respectable excuse; they could have been worked out if there had been a right spirit and a real desire for unity. We can become ever so scriptural in doctrine and practice, and still continue dividing and competing unless our hearts are changed and the nature of God is born in us by the Spirit and the word. Much religious separatism is nothing more than carnal ambition or self-righteousness wearing a religious cloak. Though the Restoration

Movement made much progress in returning to scriptural foundations in doctrine and practice, it did not do as well in addressing the need for spiritual and inward change.

Therefore, in order to have religious unity, our doctrine must continually be reformed by the scriptures, and our hearts reformed by the Holy Spirit. All of this requires humility. A proud person cannot discard his treasured human traditions nor his carnal actions and attitudes. And that kind of humility is only possible when we have been reborn inwardly through the Spirit and given the new nature of Christ. Let us submit to the scriptures and to the Spirit. In so doing we will fulfill the prayer of Jesus: "[I pray] that all of them may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" - John 17:20,21.

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