

The University Heights Messenger

July 25, 2010

Restoration Principles In John's Epistles

By Bill Hall

Changes inevitably occur with the passing of time. New teachers arise, introducing doctrines that are false, but attractive. Each new generation tends to be more sophisticated than the former, rejecting the "outmoded" practices of their forefathers and adopting new ideas and practices.

This is not a new phenomenon. Changes occurred in the first century as they do now. As there are "brotherhood issues" today, they were "brotherhood issues" that affected Christians of the first century: the question of circumcision, and toward the end of the first century, gnosticism, with its varying models and corrupting morals. By the time John wrote his epistles, many changes had occurred since Pentecost in the thinking, morals, and attitudes of the people. As John addresses the changes that had occurred, he lays down three principles that should guide us in dealing with the changes of our day.

When changes occur, we must go back to "the beginning," not to what has been traditionally accepted.

"Back to the beginning" is the very essence of restoration, and it is to the beginning that John leads his readers. We read from his pen, "*Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning*" (1 John 2:7); again, "*For this is the message that you heard from the beginning*" (1 John 3:11; see also 2 John 5-6). John further assures his readers that "*if what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*" (1 John 2:24). Acceptance of that which is from the beginning is therefore

essential to acceptance with God.

When changes occur, we must go back to the source of truth, not to highly trained "clergymen" or "know-it-all" dictators in the church.

In fact, John's writings would erase all "clergy-laity" distinctions. He does not write to a few seminary trained scholars who, in turn, are to interpret his writings for the untrained layman. He addresses "little children," "fathers," and "young men" (1 John 2:12-14). MacKnight, in his comments on these verses, uses the terms "new converts," "old Christians," and "vigorous Christians." All are to read John's letter, understand it, and follow its teaching. People will never return to truth as long as they allow a few learned men to do all their studying and thinking for them.

John teaches his readers to "*test the spirits, whether they are of God*" (1 John 4:1), rather than to follow blindly their teaching. The elect lady must determine whether or not a teacher "*abides in the doctrine of Christ*" before extending to him hospitality and fellowship (2 John 9-11). Gaius must not give in to the dictates of domineering Diotrophes (3 John 9-11). John's message in all these passages is that every Christian must read, think, come to sound conclusions, and stand, even when his stand brings him into conflict with the elite of the church. This is the only way to find truth when changes occur.

When changes occur, we must go back to the apostles, not to high-sounding philosophies that may be gaining popularity all around us.

The philosophies of gnosticism were impressive. Those who espoused them took

on an air of superiority. But John says of the apostles: *“We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”* (1 John 4:6). “Back to the apostles,” John is saying. This is the means by which the spirits are to be tried, and false prophets are to be separated from the true. In commending Demetrius, John further says, *“You know that our testimony is true”* (3 John 12). We “go back to the apostles” today when we go the New Testament scriptures. This is our only means of knowing *“the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”* and of standing on testimony that is true.

We may differ in our estimation of the “restoration movement” of the nineteenth century and of its leaders, but we must not veer from the principle of restoration. There is only one answer for the religious divisions and corrupting doctrines of our day, and that answer is the same as it was in John’s day: back to the beginning--back to the source of truth--back to the apostles. Here we take our stand! Here we withstand all enemies of truth and right! Here we know that we indeed are of God!

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

The sick list will be receiving a change in format. After the individual has been listed for a week or so, if there is no new update on their condition, I will be moving them to the list at the bottom. That list will be broken up into two groups: members of this congregation and all others. Any new updates on their health will be posted above that list as always.

Our members: **Glen Davis, Glenn Kimberlin**

Others: **Ruel Baker, Robert and Sarah Brundige, Vera Howerton, Gail Stein, Glenn Goldy, Shannon Gilbert, Harley Miller, Chuck McDavitt, the Shamas family.**

Reminders

Don’t forget to check the bulletin board in the back for upcoming meetings and the like. Our brethren in other congregations receive just as much encouragement from our visiting them as we do from them visiting us!

Remember to make use of the box in the back for sermon, bulletin, or prayer requests.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The congregational meeting will be today at 5. Please make your plans to attend.

Beginning next Sunday (August 1) we will be having a Scripture reading after the announcements both Sunday morning and evening. Men, I have posted the sheet with the reading assignment back by the ladies restroom. Familiarize yourself with its location today for we will begin next Sunday. Additionally, Garry will be adding a slot entitled “Scripture reading” under the Sunday morning and evening announcements.

BIBLE READING SCHEDULE FOR 7/25-7/31:

Sunday: 2 Kgs 16-17, Ps 144, Rev 4-6

Monday: 2 Kgs 18, Ps 145, Rev 7-9

Tuesday: 2 Kgs 19-20, Ps 146, Rev 10-12

Wednesday: 2 Kgs 19-20, Ps 146, Rev 13-15

Thursday: 2 Kgs 21-22, Ps 147, Rev 13-15

Friday: 2 Kgs 23-24, Ps 148, Rev 16-17

Saturday: 2 Kgs 25, Ps 149, Rev 18-19

SERMON TOPICS:

Sunday AM. Manasseh--A Portrait Of Repentance

Sunday PM. Sin Is Always Sin