

In order to be birthed into the vision of any local church, it is necessary to understand what God is doing in the Church today. It has been the tendency of some to see the Church only from a historical perspective – like in the Book of Acts or the great revivals of the past. We can learn from what God has done, but we must not limit His present move or actions by His past ways.

As we shared in the previous lesson, God has an ultimate purpose for the Church: to manifest God's glory, wisdom and character so that He "...*might gather together in one all things in Christ...*" (Ephesians 1:10). This is the result of an active relationship with the living Christ. We serve a God who is moving by His Spirit as the I AM in the present tense. He is not just I WAS or I WILL BE, but He is always I AM.

When writing to believers in the early church, the Apostle Peter earnestly desired that they would be "... *established in the present truth*" (2 Peter 1:12). "Present truth" is the truth which was revealed to them at that time.

The early church understood the importance of moving with God in the present tense. When standing before the Sanhedrin court, the disciples had an amazing testimony concerning those things they had personally seen and heard. The religious leaders "...*realized that they had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13). Today's world needs to see the same type of people moving with God in the present tense. The Church should testify to a now relationship with Him.

In hindsight, we see a glorious Church in the first century. Comparing it to the Church of today makes us wonder if we will ever see similar Christianity again. Yet the Bible makes plain that God is restoring truth to the Church in these final hours of history. This is what **restoration** is all about.

Haggai 2:9 *"The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the LORD of hosts.*

Joel 2:23-25 *"Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you – the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you."*

Acts 3:20-21 *"...and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."*

The Hebrew word for "restoration" is "shalam." It means "to restore something stolen or owed."

RESTORATION
DEFINED

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The Greek word for “restoration is “apokathistamai.” It literally means “to set something back to its original state.” Its fullest meaning is “to be complete, to finish, to refresh, to set again, to put back into existence or use that which has been lost.”

The Old Testament has many examples of restoration when loss was incurred. When real property was stolen the offender was responsible to make restitution. Here are some examples of this principle:

1. Restoration had to be made either in a greater measure, more substance or better quality than that which was originally taken. So, through restoration one gained more than he had lost. This principle is clear in the following biblical principles of restoration:
 - a. Exodus 22:1-9.
 - 1) Five oxen were restored for the loss of one ox.
 - 2) Four sheep were restored for the loss of one.
 - 3) Two animals were restored for each one taken.
 - 4) The best quality was to be given when making restoration.
 - 5) Twice as much money was restored for a theft.
 - b. Leviticus 6:1-5.
An additional 20 percent was restored to that which was lost.
 - c. Luke 19:8.
Even in New Testament days, the principle of restoration was mentioned. Zacchaeus wanted to restore four times the amount of money he had gained dishonestly.
2. Sarah is an example of physical restoration. The Bible describes her as being well stricken (smitten) with age. She was 90 years old – an old woman who was past the age of child-bearing. However, God had promised that she would bear Abraham’s son, who would be the father of a great nation. This could happen only through restoration.

If we follow along in the Genesis narrative, we will notice that there was an apparent physical change in Sarah’s appearance. Abimelech, king of Gerar, obviously wanted her in his harem (Genesis 20:1-18), which leads us to believe that God miraculously restored her physical beauty. She was restored to such an extent that she was able to conceive and bear the promised seed, Isaac.

Although man can restore physical property, only God can restore spiritual things (Joel 2:25). He alone can cause change in the lives of believers and in the Church. By God’s purpose – not man’s plans – the years the Church has lost are being restored.

**THE PRESENT
TRUTH OF THE
EARLY CHURCH**

The power of the Holy Spirit which fell on the Day of Pentecost transformed the disciples into dynamic witnesses whom Christ used to establish His Church. The apostles gave themselves to prayer and study of the Word which caused the early

church to operate in truth. The New Testament was written during this time by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through such men as Peter, James, John, Luke and Paul. They experienced:

1. Salvation by faith (Acts 16:30-31)
2. Water baptism by immersion (Acts 8:38-39)
3. Holiness and sanctification from the world (2 Corinthians 6:17)
4. Healing by the power of the Spirit (Acts 5:16)
5. Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4)
6. Laying on of hands and prophecy (Acts 13:3)
7. Resurrection of the dead (Acts 9:36-40)
8. Eternal judgment (Acts 5:1-11)
9. Praise and worship (Acts 16:25)
10. Joy (Acts 13:52)

Throughout the New Testament, the early church was warned against slow deterioration. The apostles could look ahead a few hundred years to see a Church which would err from its commitment to truth, holiness and sincere faith. Here are some of their warnings of this decline:

THE CHURCH THROUGH THE DECLINE

Acts 20:29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."

2 Peter 3:3-4 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?...."

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

There is a span of approximately 60 years between the writings of the apostles (which ended around 65 A.D.) and the writings of the first century church fathers (which began around 125 A.D.). During this lapse of communication, decline had already begun to grip the Church. As the Church expanded throughout the world, it picked up many pagan practices from other cultures. These compromises were soon tolerated as commitment to the Word and the local church was de-emphasized.

How could the Church which had experienced such power, grace, liberty and pure worship fall into the death grip of the enemy? This decline did not happen overnight, but took hundreds of years. With the slow deterioration of the Church, many **revelation truths** were either formalized, diluted or lost altogether. The Church reverted from life in the Spirit to a slowly encrusting heartbeat of lifeless liturgy. By the sixth century, the Church had lost almost all truth it possessed in its beginning. The material below shows what the Church lost during its first 500 years. It is taken from Present Day Truths by Dick Iverson (Copyright © 1975, Bible Temple, used by permission):

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"1. 30-100 A.D. From the day of the Pentecost to the death of John the Church was a powerful instrument for the extension of the Kingdom of God. From the death of the last of the original Twelve Apostles we have no evidence that this type of **Apostolic ministry** continued.

"2. 130 A.D. Because the Apostolic ministry was no longer functioning in the Early Church, the parallel ministry of the **Prophet** soon vanished. With the loss of this ministry the doctrine of the **Laying on of Hands** became nothing more than ritual. By 140 A.D. prophetic utterance of any kind in the local congregation was very scarce.

"3. 150 A. D. With such lack of dependence on the Spirit of God and an actual persecution of the biblical manifestations of the Spirit by the established churches, it is not surprising that the biblical experience of the **Baptism of the Spirit** and the **Gifts of the Spirit** were no longer evidenced by 150 A.D. Much of the external form of these things was maintained, but the people had no living encounter with the Spirit.

"4. 160 A.D. As men no longer demonstrated a Spirit-controlled life, it became impractical to have a **plurality of eldership**. Without a strong unity of the Spirit multiple leadership tends to pull against another. As a result, monarchical bishops became the norm by 160 A.D., and men began to appraise clergy on the basis of natural ability.

"5. 180 A.D. If man is not able to look to the Spirit for direction and guidance, he must look to other men. And so it was with the smaller and more recently established Local Churches by 180 A.D. Many of these smaller Churches became so dependent on larger Churches that they lost their **Local Church autonomy**. By this time many such Churches were looking to Rome for direction, and thus, early seeds of Roman primacy are developing by this early date.

"6. 200 A.D. By this time the Spirit had very little control over the lives of individuals. Very little of the body of Church doctrine and truth became the actual experience of believers. A gap began to form between doctrine and experience. The external form remained the same in many cases, but the spiritual awareness of what was contained in the form was beginning to vanish. It was about this time that baptism began to be abused in many ways. In 185 A.D. we have the first record of an infant baptism...

"7. 210 A.D. Since the distinction between the clergy and the laity was so acute by this time, the concept of the **priesthood of all believers** was not understood or acknowledged. Therefore, the ministry of the body of Christ (Body-ministry) was not at all understood. Because of these trends, the truth was soon altered to line up with experience, and the ministers or clergy were the only ones designated 'priests'.

"8. 225 A.D. Most Churches by this time were not receiving direct guidance and teaching from the Spirit of God. They could, therefore, no longer trust the Spirit to bring and maintain unity of the faith. In order to enforce and maintain

an external unity, creeds or statements of beliefs began to be written as criteria for Church membership.

"9. 240 A.D. By the middle of the third century much worldliness had crept into the Church. Without the power of the Spirit to lead a separate life, the standard of holiness and the sanctified life held up by the Early Church became an unrealistic life for many. Some recognized this problem and began the first monasteries at this time. This made provision for a double standard in Christian living. There was the 'average Christian' and the ascetic who tried to lead the 'deeper life'.

"10. 300 A.D. Because of the rigor of these ascetic groups, there developed an over-emphasis on works as a sort of merit for eternal life. This merely laid the ground work for what was to come later under Constantine.

"11. 313 A.D. Constantine became ruler of the great Roman Empire and chose Christianity as the best possible of religions. At this time the state began to exercise control over the affairs of the established Church, and men of little or no religious experience became instrumental in shaping Church doctrine. Even the outcome of the Council of Nicea was the result of the efforts of Constantine.

"12. 350 A.D. About 350 A.D., Christianity being the religion of the state, all those who were not in the Church were persecuted. As can well be expected, many heathens preferred to be called "Christian" rather than face the sword. At this time the experience of **salvation** with the doctrine of **justification by faith** and the new birth into the Kingdom of God was no longer emphasized.

"13. 380 A.D. This movement culminated with Theodosius who made Rome, which had already been the capital of the empire, the final authority in Church matters as well."

Thus the Church entered the period known as the Dark Ages. It continued to sink deeper and deeper into darkness until the 15th century.

During the 15th century, revelation truth began to be restored to the Church. God was once again breathing life into His Church.

GOD'S PLAN OF
RESTORATION

1. 1400 A.D. The first translation of the entire Bible from the original scriptures was made available to the common people under the ministry of John Wycliffe. This is important because revelation is always based upon God's Word.
2. 1517 A.D. Martin Luther was used to restore the most foundational of all truth – **Justification by Faith**.
3. 1524 A.D. The Anabaptist movement was started as it saw the restoration of **Water Baptism**.

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4. 1750 A.D. Through the ministry of John Wesley, the truth of **Sanctification and Holiness** was restored to the church.
5. 19th Century A.B. Simpson and others were used to restore the truth of **Healing** to the church.
6. 1901 A.D. The **Baptism of the Holy Spirit** came in a mighty outpouring upon the church.
7. 1906 A.D. The **Gifts of the Spirit** began to be restored in the Azusa Street Revival.
8. 1948 A.D. The truths of the **Five-fold Ministry, Laying on of Hands and Praise and Worship** were restored through a mighty Canadian revival.

God moved in revival when each of these truths were being revealed. However denominations were established basing their ministry on only one particular truth. When new truths were restored, these denominations were usually the first to persecute those who were following the present movings of God. For example, the Roman Church persecuted Luther's followers because of their position on justification by faith. In turn, Luther's followers persecuted the Anabaptists because of their position on water baptism. The persecuted became the persecutors due to their unwillingness to accept present truth.

We need to learn from historic errors of the Church and continue to yield to the Holy Spirit as He continues to restore the Church unto full stature. If we fail to do so, we will become "old wineskins" unable to hold on to God's truth (Matthew 9:17).

RESTORATION APPLIED TO THE CHURCH TODAY

For many years, the Church has made attempts to fulfill the plan of God through its own programs without the Spirit. The need for restoration within the ministry of the local church is apparent. Yet, since the turn of the century, the amount of truth being restored has increased greatly. It seems as if each new decade is seeing a greater illumination of spiritual truth.

With abundance of truth, our accountability increases. We must maintain these precious truths without allowing them to become meaningless activities or empty form. We must not allow truth to become antiquated. When truth deteriorates into form or ritual, it becomes legalistic, grieves the Holy Spirit and chokes out life. We must not become stagnant by camping on one truth, for this will lead to a narrow perspective of God's overall purpose. The following chart shows the result of principles becoming legalistic and lifeless.

PRINCIPLE	can become	LAW
Revelation Truth.....		Dogma
Life.....		Legalism
Organism.....		Organization
Freedom.....		Form
Repentance.....		Penance
Worship.....		Ritual
Spontaneous Praying.....		Written Prayers
Glorious Processions.....		Religious Pomp
Holiness.....		Worldliness
Servant Leaders.....		Papal Dictators

Even though many churches have not even begun to enter into the spiritual truths being revealed today, this does not mean that only a small portion of the Body of Christ will. God has been restoring truth for the last 500 years, and He will continue to restore it to those who are hungry.

The Church is experiencing the restoration of truth today. For example, in Acts 15:15 we read that God has promised to restore the power of His presence to the Church. This is described as the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. A thorough study of the Scripture brings us to the understanding that the tabernacle of David speaks of worship being restored as a priority to God's people. The spiritual application of the tabernacle of David is that God's people gather unto the Lord Jesus Christ to worship Him and experience His presence. The result will be *"...that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us"* (2 Corinthians 4:7).

We are privileged in this day to see this truth restored to the Body of Christ. There is a restoration of praise and worship that is beginning to cover the earth *"...with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14). We are beginning to see the fulfillment of all that the holy prophets have spoken concerning restoration.

Isaiah 6:11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the LORD GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

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RESPONSIVE READING

Question 1: What is necessary for a local church or an individual to experience God's restoration?

It must be realized that God has something to say that is relevant to our present circumstances. This is called present truth.

2 Peter 1:12 Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth.

Question 2: Is there any indication in Scripture that truth would be lost to the Church?

Yes, the apostles warned about the loss of truth.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Question 3: Does the Bible make plain that God is restoring that which was lost to the Church?

Yes, in fact Scripture indicates that Jesus is being retained in heaven until everything the prophets have spoken is restored.

Acts 3:20-21 And that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Question 4: Was the early church established in biblical truth?

Yes, the early church was established in truths such as salvation by faith, water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, sanctification, gifts of the Spirit, praise and worship.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Question 5: According to the prophets, how will the glory of the Church compare with the glory that filled the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon?

The glory of the Church will be greater.

Haggai 2:9 "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the LORD of hosts.

Question 6: What scriptural hope do we have for restoration?

The prophets of old prophesied that the house of the Lord would be established.

Isaiah 2:2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

Question 7: What does the tabernacle of David have to do with God's plan of restoration?

Everything, because it concerns the power of God's presence in the Church and in world evangelism.

Acts 15:15-17 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: "after this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things."