

“RESTORING BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY”

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! REPENT AND DO THE THINGS YOU DID AT FIRST. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:1-5 NIV).

I am humbled and honored that Ozark Christian College would ask me to bring this final message in a series of seven on “The Core Values of Ozark Christian College.”

Charlie Brown once said, “Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, ‘Where have I gone wrong?’ Then a voice says to me, ‘This is going to take more than one night.’ That’s the way I feel about this topic that has been assigned to me.

The core value of any Bible college or Christian church should include this one: restoring biblical Christianity. The restoration of New Testament Christianity has been what this college has been about since its founding. It is also the goal of the churches this institution serves.

Let me be clear in my terms. By “restoration” I mean the process of bringing back to a former position or condition. *Doing the things you did at first!* Restoration is an ongoing process, not a finished state. By “biblical” I mean that which is contained within the inspired Word of God. For a thing to be biblical, it must be found in the Bible. By “Christianity” I mean that which reflects the spirit and practice of Christ. Christianity begins and ends with Christ.

Restoring biblical Christianity has been the bold and noble plea of the American Restoration Movement, or Stone-Campbell Movement, for 200 years. Today it is still the desire of colleges and churches connected with the undenominational fellowship of Christian churches/churches of

Christ, the churches of Christ (a cappella), and some conservative churches known as Disciple Heritage Fellowship.

I. RESTORING BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IS A SCRIPTURAL THEME

Scripture is the all-sufficient norm for our faith. Everything that is necessary for the salvation of the soul, the spiritual development of the believer, and the work of the church is provided in God’s Word. Scripture is a powerful, living document that effectually works in the lives of believers. A. T. Pierson said, “While other books inform, and some reform, this one book transforms!”

- “For the word of God is living and active” (Heb. 4:12).
- Paul said this Word of God “is at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).
- Peter adds, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him...” (2 Pet. 1:3).

The ultra-liberal United Church of Christ (UCC) says God is still speaking, (“God is still speaking,”). They tell us to never place a period where God has placed a comma. Implication? God is telling us to be “open and affirming” to lesbians, homosexuals and transgendered persons. I would say to them that in these last days God has spoken. He has spoken to us by His Son. Never put a comma where God has put a period – period! (You should know that the UCC is a result of a merger between

the Christian Connection and the Congregational Church in 1931. The Christian Connection was once a part of the Restoration Movement. Without the Bible, you can not only lose your bearings; you can lose your Christian connection!

The theme of Scripture is Christ. Twelve hours before He went to the cross, Jesus 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). This prayer contains four things essential to restoring biblical Christianity.

1. *The Lordship of Christ.* Jesus prayed for those who would believe in Him, i.e. that He is who He claimed to be: the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the world, the promised Christ, the Lord of the church. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared, "Therefore let all the house of Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Christ is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all.
2. *The authority of Scripture.* Jesus prayed for those who would believe in Him through the message of the apostles. "Through their word" is how some translations put it. From the Day of Pentecost on, believers have devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). Martin Luther credited the success of the Reformation to the power of God's Word. "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing...The Word did it all."
3. *The unity of all believers.* The restoration of biblical Christianity calls for the unity of all believers. Jesus prayed, "That all of them (who believe that I am both Lord and Christ, based upon the teaching and testimony of the apostles) may be one, united, together, one body." He even gave the divine model, "as You, Father, are in me, and I in You." There is no division between Father and Son and there should be no division between brother and sister. Why?

4. *The evangelization of the world.* Jesus prayed that believers would be one in order to have an impact upon those who don't know that God loves them. "That the world may believe...that the world might know." That the world might be saved! It is my conviction that the unity of all believers is absolutely essential to the conversion of the world. The world at its worst needs the church at its best.

To quote your own President Ken Idleman: "There are four pillars on which the Restoration Movement must stand. They are the essentials of the faith... We must rally as one around these four absolutes. They are the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Bible, the unity of believers, the evangelization of the world. In my lifetime, I have never seen the Restoration plea so affirmed and validated by both the Christian community and the seeking society. Our hour of destiny and opportunity has arrived in this generation. New Testament Christianity need not be popularly embraced to be validated, but it is especially encouraging when it is recognized for what it is - light for our age" (Christian Standard, Aug. 10, 2003).

II. RESTORING BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IS AT THE HEART OF OUR CHERISHED SLOGANS.

A slogan is a maxim or proverb that contains within it the wisdom of the ages. "Pretty is as pretty does." "A stitch in time saves nine." "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." A Bush in the White House is worth two...but I digress!

The slogan of this college is "Teaching the word of Christ in the spirit of Christ." The slogan of my alma mater, Midwestern School of Evangelism, is the same as the one at Pepperdine University: "Freely ye have received, freely give." Slogans are significant.

You are part of an institution connected with a movement that has produced some significant slogans. Here are seven of the best.

1. The Bible only makes Christians only.
2. No book but the Bible, no creed but Christ, no names but the divine.

3. We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.
4. Let the unity of Christians be our polar star.
5. Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent. (“Silent” is an ancient Hebrew word meaning, “Shut up before the Lord thy God!” Just kidding!)
6. In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love.
7. We are free to differ, but not to divide.

Several themes are at the heart of all these slogans: Scripture, Christ, Christians, unity, liberty, and love. They reveal to us what we are supposed to be as a people of God – followers of Christ; non-creedal, non-judgmental, Bible-believing Christians; Christians only, united in love. It would be hard to find better core values for any college or church. Though slogans should never replace Scripture, or be equated with Scripture, they contain great principles that will help us in our efforts to restore biblical Christianity in our lives and in the churches we serve.

III. RESTORING BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY – SAMPLES

Ogden Nash once said, “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day. I’d rather someone show me, than merely point the way.” OCC is located in the “Show-Me” state. So, here are some samples or specimens of how this core value works.

Christian Standard is read every week by nearly 100,000 people in our fellowship of churches. It has been published weekly since 1866 (the oldest weekly publication in the U.S.). Consider its motto: “Devoted to the restoration of New Testament Christianity, its doctrine, its ordinances, and its fruit.”

Gospel Advocate is the oldest publication among churches of Christ, even predating Christian Standard, 1855. This year marks its 150th anniversary. Its motto is briefer but still to the point: “Living Truth for the world today.”

The Voice of Evangelism is in its 59th year of existence. It is where I started my writing career. Its motto: “Preaching the Word, Defending the Faith.”

One Body, the magazine I have edited since Don DeWelt named me editor in 1984, takes its motto from John 17: “Answering our Lord’s prayer for Christian unity and world evangelism.”

The mottoes of these four journals give us examples of this vital core value of restoring biblical Christianity. They use carefully chosen words like “New Testament Christianity,” “Living Truth,” “The Word,” “The Faith,” “Christian Unity,” and “World Evangelism.”

College Press has just released a new book by Sam Stone, “Simply Christians: New Testament Christianity in the 21st Century.” Stone is a graduate of OCC. For 25 years he edited *Christian Standard*. In his final editorial, he said, “I want to do whatever I can to encourage the restoration of New Testament Christianity in our 21st-century world.” He contends in his new book that many people in the world today are looking for basic Christianity. In his conclusion, he writes, “Let the church be the church our Lord wants it to be. No different in any essential element. True to Scripture. Serving Him daily. Living in the hope of Heaven. Showing love to everyone.”

Every Sunday in America, in nearly 19,000 congregations represented by these fellowships, about 2.5 million worshipers assemble in the name of Jesus. They continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. The breaking of bread, or Lord’s Supper, is one of two ordinances faithfully observed in these churches – baptism (immersion) being the other. The fruit of N.T. Christianity is seen in the multitude of good works done in Jesus’ name by these people. Christian education, day schools, evangelism, church planting, world missions, Bible colleges, Christian universities, Bible chairs, campus ministries, childrens’ homes, orphanages, radio and TV ministries, book publishing, prayer ministries, benevolent agencies, camps (youth and family), Bible Bowl, conventions, lectureships, Bible translation and distribution, humanitarian

aid, prison ministries, military chaplains, on and on the list could and does go!

Stadia New Church Strategies, a church-planting organization among Christian churches, has just announced that they will plant their first a cappella church of Christ in Odessa, Texas. The launch is set for October of this year.

Beginning in 1984, on this very campus, a unity effort was begun to bring together brethren from the churches of Christ and Christian churches to see how we can heal the divisions of the past and work together in the future. That effort, now known as The Restoration Forum, has met in churches and on college campuses all over the U.S. since. It will return to OCC in 2007 for its 25th anniversary meeting. But before that, great things are going to happen in 2006, the 100th anniversary of the separation that occurred in 1906 over instrumental music and the missionary society. Brethren all over the United States and abroad who are concerned about restoring biblical Christianity are going to do something about it!

When United Flight 93 was hijacked by terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001, two men on board, unbeknownst to each other, were connected with our movement. We all know the words of Todd Beamer, "Are you guys ready? Jesus help me. Let's roll." Not as well known are the words of Thomas E. Burnett Jr., a graduate of Pepperdine University. On his cell phone he spoke to his wife Deena: "I know we're all going to die. But some of us are going to do something about it." They did. We should. We can. We must!

Faculty and students of OCC, hear me. I know we're all going to die. But some of us are going to do something about it. Are you guys ready? Jesus help us! Let's roll!

***Preached at Ozark Christian College, Joplin, MO
April 26, 2005, by Victor Knowles, founder and
president of Peace on Earth Ministries (POEM).***