

Community Church Huddersfield
Roots of Restoration Notes

Session 5 - The Pilgrim Church

- Therefore the Holy Spirit is not just about our individual experiences but about the fulfilment of the purposes of God in the earth,¹

1. We must be committed to the pilgrim nature of the Church.

- a. To be part of God's church is to be a pilgrim (Ps.84:5; Heb.11:8-10)
 - i. Journeying toward the city of God
- b. 'God has yet more light to break forth from his holy word.'
- c. Change is here to stay!

2. Paradoxically, at the same time as being pilgrims we are builders

- a. We are already at the city (Heb.12:22) and building the Temple (Eph.2:19-22)
- b. We have to build according to God's pattern (Heb.8:8; Ex.25:8,9; 26:30; Num.8:4)²
- c. We must build on the right foundations (1 Cor.3:11; Eph.2:20)³
- d. We must be careful what we build on the foundations (1 Cor.3:10-13)
 - i. Remember the story of the couple who totally changed and redecorated the house they had borrowed over the summer
- e. There can be no whitewashing of dodgy walls!
- f. There are divine principles (non-negotiable) and human methods (expendable)
 - i. We need to have flexible structures that can change as God does new things
 - New wineskins for new wine (Matt.9:16-17)

3. How to become a denomination – settling on the journey!

- a. Settling and no longer moving forward in fresh revelation and life
- b. Becoming totally locked into, defensive of and camping around our precious aspect of truth

¹ We've enjoyed his power, His presence and His illumination, but we've not seen the cosmic, universal, historical, eschatological significance of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the earth. (Ern Baxter, *The King, the Kingdom and the Holy Spirit*, p.37)

² ..God does not have a variety of patterns. However, there is a variety within this 'one pattern.' God does care about his pattern and how his church is built, even though men may ridicule those who desire to build according to this pattern in the mount! It is of great significance that God's glory only comes where all was according to his pattern. The pattern preceded the glory; the glory sealed the pattern.... It should be remembered that one could have the pattern without the glory, but one cannot have the glory without the pattern. (Kevin J Conner, *The Church in the New Testament*, p.8)

³ The tragedy of wrong foundations is that they are discovered at such cost. They are hidden from view and only revealed at times of great pressure. The house may be an impressive structure with attractive decorations, but outward appearances can be very deceptive. (Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*)

- c. Party spirit develops⁴
- d. Accepting labels
- e. Spiritual death and fossilisation begins⁵

4. How to maintain a denomination and become a religious institution - wrong foundations and wrong building

- a. Organisation dominates the organic; the structure dominates the life
- b. People become comfortable, acceptable, respectable and eventually institutional
- c. Start building not according to God's pattern but according to man's ideas, customs, preferences and convenience.
- d. Become filled with and even dominated by the merely religious but unregenerate – the mixed multitude.
- e. All this can happen to any church – including us!
 - i. Our awareness of this process is not to sit in judgement on others or go fossil hunting
 - ii. It is so that we can keep alert so that we don't let it happen to us.
- f. It is possible to have many godly, spiritual, sincere people of faith in these denominations and institutions
 - i. We are not being critical of the people, but the institutions
 - ii. I would like these people to be free
 - iii. But they must recognise it as a prison!
- g. It is not just about structural changes but freeing people to reach their full potential in Christ.⁶

5. Another kind of danger - Christian faddism

- a. Getting on to the latest fad and neglecting the truths that God has restored to us over the years
 - i. Remember the story of man picking fruit with a hole in his basket!
- b. It over-emphasises experiences, 'good ideas' and intellectual speculations over truth and a substantial and ongoing work of the Spirit.

⁴ "It was not acceptable for local churches to divide over doctrine or allegiance to a particular apostle. They were to consider themselves part of the whole" (Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*)

See 1 Cor.1:2

⁵ 'Many people are living in a cocoon - something that is left behind after the living thing has gone; it is an old form that was unable to contain the life that was in it!! They are living in a relic of a past era, an empty shell.'

⁶ *Denominationalism is at its worst when it is on our spirit. If we, by the grace of God and by obedience to the word of God, can build in the light of the New Testament doctrine, what we call ourselves will be quite secondary. Our priority will be wholehearted desire to see the church of God in all its glory being manifested through local assemblies which, while honouring and respecting one another, remain free from the kind of organisation that divides the body.* (Terry Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*)

6. **Just how bad is religion?**

- a. In the OT God continually warned not only about foreign gods but empty ritual within Israel (1 Sam.15:22; Ps.40:6; Hosea 6:6; **Isa.29:13**)
 - i. Other religions and the Judeo-Christian religion are just as bad as each other!
 - ii. They are human and not divine creations
- b. Opposition to Jesus
 - i. Religious leaders were his worst enemy
 - ii. Religion combined with political power and crucified Jesus
- c. Paul's Problems (see for example **Col.2:6-23**)
 - i. Judaizers - Legalistic orthodox
 - ii. Gnostics - Mystical and intellectualist heterodox
- d. Book of Revelation
 - i. The two beasts – political and religious power (see Rev.13)
 - ii. Israel becomes Babylon (Revelation 17:5)
- e. Religion kills!!⁷

7. **Religion in the Church – the obvious**

- a. Distinction between sacred and secular
- b. Distinction between clergy and laity
- c. Infant baptism
- d. Ritualistic worship⁸
- e. Holy places and holy days
- f. Concept of a national church and a mixed church
 - i. See what the mixed multitude did to the Israelites in the desert
- g. Accepting labels – Methodist, Baptist, Restorationist⁹

⁷ *Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction* (Blaise Pascal)

⁸ *Liturgies, whether ancient or modern, written or unwritten, are a human device, to keep the religious wheels turning by doing what is customary, rather than exercising faith in the immediate presence and operation of the Spirit. Consequently they cover up the need for the return of the Spirit when he has departed, and they hinder faith for spontaneity and variety.* (Wallis, *The Radical Christian*, p.120)

⁹ *I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St Paul would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him whose doctrine we have.* (Martin Luther in Hugh Thomsen Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology*, p.135)

I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever. (Spurgeon, *Memorial Library*, Vol.1, p.168)

Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion. (John Wesley, *Universal Knowledge*, p.540)

- h. Can end up with moral legalism (Pharisees) or intellectual licence (Sadducees)
 - i. We see both in religious institutions today.

8. Religion in the Church – the subtle

- a. Anything which replaces the genuine life of the Spirit with:¹⁰
 - i. Weird experiences (mystical),
 - ii. False knowledge or cold rationalism (intellectual)
 - iii. Empty traditions (ritualistic)
- b. Personal experiences placed over Spirit and Word
- c. Superspirituality and charisma
- d. Subtle distinctions between the sacred and secular
 - i. The whole of life is spiritual
 - ii. Not just meetings or devotional times
- e. Becoming satisfied with the comfortable, the familiar and the customary
- f. Intellectualism
- g. Legalism
- h. Being respectable rather than being radical
 - i. Becoming mainstream – shallow!!
- i. Orthodox purism – crossing the *ts* and dotting the *is* of doctrine.

9. Can we try to renew a denomination or religious institution from within?

- a. Institution: Come out and be separate!¹¹
- b. Denomination: it depends!
 - i. Is there anointed and radical leadership?
 - ii. Are people willing to change?
 - iii. Are people willing to governed only by Word and Spirit?
 - iv. Is there a ‘denominational ceiling?’
- c. Laying the axe to the root! (Matt.3:10)

10. How a fragmented church comes to unity

¹⁰ *A thing only expresses new life if it continues to express new life that springs from the heart....we must not allow ourselves to become moulded and hardened into old patterns, forms and expressions of external, religious life.....Restoration is only restoration if it continues to restore. Religious externalism is a terminal practice; its forms, methods and practices are merely the death throes of that which was once vibrant with life.* (Bryn Jones, *The Radical Church*, pp.52-53)

¹¹ *It is often argued that we should stay in the midst of churches and bodies whose sins and follies we deplore, in the hope of saving them for God and mankind. Such reasoning has a good deal of force in the first stages of decline. A strong protest may arrest error and stop the gangrene. But as time advances, and the whole body becomes diseased; when the protests have been disregarded, and the arguments trampled underfoot; when the majority have clearly taken up their position against the truth--we have no alternative but to come out and be separate. The place from which we can exert the strongest influence for good is not from within, but from without. Lot lost all influence of his life in Sodom; but Abraham, from the heights of Mamre, was able to exert a mighty influence on its history.* (F.B.Meyer)

- a. Recognise true and false unity
 - i. Compare Tower of Babel to Pentecost (Gen.11 and Acts 2)
- b. We do not want institutional unity
 - i. E.g. Catholic Church
- c. We do not want ecumenical unity
 - i. E.g. Churches Together & World Council of Churches
 - ii. We must not sacrifice truth to try to achieve unity.
- d. We already have unity of Spirit with all God's people and we must maintain it (**Eph.4:3**)
 - i. Relating to people in other local churches
 - ii. Learning to disagree without being disagreeable
 - iii. Not being satisfied by papering over cracks.
- e. We are aiming for the unity of faith (**Eph.4:13**)
 - i. Can only be achieved by building God's way – according to the pattern he gives
 - Cannot sacrifice truth
 - ii. It will require all Ephesians 4 gifts (**v.11-12**)
 - iii. It will require both truth and love (**v.15**)
 - iv. It will require a fully mobilised church – each part doing its work (**v.16**)
 - Best thing you can do to build a united Church is to be fully engaged in a local church that is under truly anointed leadership, receiving all Eph.4 ministries, building real relationships and play your part in it with all your heart.

11. How to stay a pilgrim church and not settle:

- a. Recognise that God has yet more light to break forth from his Word (we haven't got it all)
- b. Recognise that Word and Spirit go together
- c. Be totally open to the Holy Spirit to direct and guide
- d. Keep a humble, teachable attitude
- e. Follow anointed leaders – especially apostles and prophets.
- f. Guard you heart against settling attitudes creeping in
- g. Live a life of faith – a wonderful adventure that gets scary at times
- h. Don't get stuck in the things that you like and feel comfortable with
- i. Recognise it's possible to be belong to a church that is moving forward and not be moving forward your self
- j. Avoid spending too much time looking backwards – nostalgia/memory lane

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