

Introduction:

- **Is restoration possible?**
 - That sounds like a fairly simple question. But the longer you think about it, the more fundamental that question becomes.
 - Can individual Christians leave the will of God and know that they have left it? Can an entire local congregation drift away from God's original intentions and recognize that it has drifted? And if so, can that individual and/or local congregation actually go back?
 - Not merely go back to something that worked in the past. Not go back to the teachings of a particular teacher/preacher. Not go back to the practices of a particular congregation. Not go back to a particular movement. Not go back to a particular generation.
 - Can we go back to what God has originally intended? Is that a biblical idea? Does God ever call His people to return? Does Scripture give us examples of people who departed from God's revealed will and then sought to recover it? And, perhaps more importantly, has God revealed His will clearly enough and preserved it faithfully enough that His people can actually return to it?
- This is where I want to begin.
 - Not with the Restoration Movement.
 - Not with Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) or Barton W. Stone (1772-1844).
 - Not with an analysis of generational debates over hermeneutics.
 - Not with what we have traditionally called "the issues."
 - I want to begin with a more basic question: **Is restoration itself a biblical concept?**
 - Because if it is a biblical concept, we need to pay some serious attention to it.
 - But if it is not a biblical concept, we need to abandon it. And we need to ask another question: **What is the alternative?**
- For the purposes of this conference, I also want to ask another question—which might make us all a little uncomfortable: **What if we are wrong?**
 - What if something we have defended for generations is not actually what God wants?
 - And if we are wrong, how would we know? What would be our standard? And if we discovered that we had departed from God's will, would it actually be possible for us to get back?
 - I ask these questions because there is a huge assumption behind the idea of restoration: Restoration assumes that true Christianity, as God has intended, CAN be recovered.
 - It assumes that God's will is attainable. We can know it and follow it.
 - It assumes that God's revelation is authoritative. The Bible is the word of God.
 - It assumes that God's desires for us have been preserved. The faith has been handed down one time for all generations (**Jude 3**).
 - It assumes that departure from God's intentions can/will be identified.
 - It assumes that God's people can return.
 - If you take any of these assumptions away, restoration begins to collapse.
 - So, the question then becomes, **did God design Christianity in such a way that it can be restored?**
- The simple answer: Absolutely! Yes!
 - Restoration is a biblical idea.
 - God does provide a model for His people to return to His original intentions.
 - God has revealed and preserved His will sufficiently for His people to recognize what He wants.
 - We can distinguish between genuine restoration and merely restoring our own traditions.

- It may not always be easy. It may make us uncomfortable. But we can do it because God has designed it that way. We can return.

I. What is *restoration*?

- a. When we use the word *restoration*, we need to be very careful about what we mean.
 - i. *Restoration* does NOT mean pretending we are first-century Christians living in a first-century world.
 - ii. It does NOT mean recovering every cultural circumstance of the first century.
 - iii. It does NOT mean reproducing a particular congregation from Acts.
 - iv. And it certainly does NOT mean assuming that everything practiced by people in generations past is either right or wrong simply because they practiced it.
- b. Restoration means something much simpler, but more demanding.
 - i. When we discover that we have departed from God's revealed will, we must return.
 - ii. *Restoration* is the deliberate effort of God's people to return to the will of God revealed in Scripture when they have departed from it.
 - iii. Restoration is about a relationship with God and His revealed will. It is NOT simply going backward in time. It is NOT an attempt to recreate the first century. It is an attempt to recover the will of God that was revealed in the first century.
 1. We are NOT trying to restore first-century clothing, transportation, technology, culture, or even every circumstance that surrounded the first-century church.
 2. We are simply asking: What did God intend for His people, and can His people return to that intention when they have departed from it?
- c. Restoration assumes three main things...
 - i. Restoration assumes an ORIGINAL.
 1. You cannot restore something unless there is something to which you are returning.
 2. A restored car is not merely a car that looks old. It is being returned to a previous condition. It is being renewed. It is returning to its original state.
 3. Biblical restoration demands an original intention.
 - a. God intended something.
 - b. God revealed something.
 - c. God's people departed from something.
 - d. God's people can therefore seek to return to something.
 - ii. Restoration assumes DEPARTURE.
 1. This is where restoration becomes different from simply saying, "Let's study the Bible together to see if we can get on the same page."
 2. Restoration asks, "Have we departed from what God originally revealed?"
 3. If there has been no departure, restoration is not necessary.
 - iii. Restoration assumes a RETURN.
 1. Restoration is NOT merely discovering that we have departed. It is turning back.
 2. That is why biblical language uses words like return, restore, renew, repair, repent, remember, seek, do again, etc.
- d. Simply put, *restoration* is the return of God's people to His revealed will after departing from it.

- i.* It begins with God’s will, not our tradition. It recognizes departure, rather than assuming that everything we currently practice is correct. And it calls for return, rather than merely acknowledging that we have changed.
 - ii.* Restoration is NOT the preservation of religious tradition. It is the recovery of God’s revealed intention.
- e.** Restoration does NOT mean restoring everything that somebody in the past believed was biblical.
 - i.* Don’t think, “We are restoring the practices of the old paths because our predecessors got Christianity right.”
 - ii.* Our standard for restoration is NOT:
 - 1. Alexander Campbell or Barton W. Stone.
 - 2. The practices of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries.
 - 3. What non-institutional churches of Christ have historically practiced.
 - iii.* Our standard is the revealed will of God.
 - 1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*
 - 2. 1 Peter 4:11 – *“Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*
 - 3. If we discover that something we have traditionally practiced is not God’s will, then restoration demands that we change it.
 - 4. Restoration is not the preservation of the past. In fact, restoration actually demands our willingness to abandon the past when our past is not faithful to God’s will.
 - a.* Do you see how the idea of restoration makes people uncomfortable? It demands change. In fact, it may even demand a radical change—a radical restoration.
 - b.* Think about it: The most unpopular message that was ever preached was when John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judea, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matthew 3:2) Jesus would come and preach that exact same message. After being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Matthew 4:17 tells us that “Jesus began to preach and say, *‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*”
 - c.* The temptation for us is to become so familiar with the “Bible words”—words like restoration and repentance—that they lose their meanings. But these words demand CHANGE. And people do not like being told to CHANGE.
- f.** In light of modern criticisms of the restoration principle, there is one more distinction that we need to consider as we define restoration. We need to distinguish between restoration and reformation.
 - i.* In the way I am using the term, reformation refers to changing or improving an existing religious system.
 - ii.* Restoration makes a different claim. The goal is not merely to grow and improve what we have inherited. The goal is to measure what we have inherited against what God has revealed, retaining what is right and correcting what is wrong.

- iii. Reformation asks, “How can we improve this?” But restoration asks, “What does God want, and have we departed from it?”
- iv. My fear is that we are sometimes tempted to be reformers, not restorers.
- g. Defining *restoration* accurately is critical if we are going to evaluate the modern criticisms of the restoration principle fairly.

II. Where is restoration found in Scripture?

- a. Before looking at various places where we find the restoration principle, I want to consider God’s provisions throughout Scripture for revealing, communicating, preserving, and teaching His will to His people.
 - i. In the Old Testament, God used various people and offices to communicate, teach, preserve, and apply His revealed will.
 1. Patriarchs
 2. Priests
 3. Levites
 4. Scribes
 5. Parents & Grandparents
 6. Judges
 7. Kings
 8. Chosen Leaders
 9. Prophets
 - ii. In the New Testament, you have similar circumstances—as noted in Ephesians 4:11-13.
 1. Apostles
 2. Prophets
 3. Evangelists
 4. Pastors
 5. Teachers
 6. Parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)
 - iii. What were the central responsibilities of those entrusted with teaching God’s people?
 1. To teach, or to instruct.
 2. To exhort, or to encourage.
 3. To reprove, or to correct what is wrong.
 4. To rebuke, or to strongly confront wrongdoing.
 5. To admonish, or to warn or instruct with corrective intent.
 - iv. Consider how consistently Scripture describes this responsibility.
 1. Genesis 18:19 – “*For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.*”
 2. Genesis 35:2-3 – “*So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods which are among you., and purify yourselves and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.’”*

3. Leviticus 10:11 – (To Aaron) *“...and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.”*
4. Deuteronomy 4:9 – *“Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and grandsons.”*
5. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 – *“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*
6. Deuteronomy 17:8-13 indicates that, under the Old Law, the priests and the Levites were responsible for looking at God’s will and making judgments about those who violated it. They were directly involved in teaching what the Law required, applying it accurately, and correcting those who violated it.
7. Deuteronomy 17:18-20, before there was ever a human king in Israel, explains that any king should write his own copy of the Law of God in the presence of the Levitical priests. It was supposed to stay with him so that he could read and obey it daily, and so that he would not turn aside from it.
8. Deuteronomy 31:9-13 tells us that it was the priests who were entrusted with the Law. They were commanded to read it publicly so that the people could hear, learn, fear God, and observe it.
9. Deuteronomy 33:10 - (To the Levites) *“They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your law to Israel.”*
10. Joshua 1:7-8 – *“Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”*
11. Ezra 7:10 – *“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*
12. Psalm 78:5-7 – *“For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children...”*
13. Proverbs 22:6 – *“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*
14. Jeremiah 7:25 – *“Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them.”*
15. Acts 2:42 – *“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

16. Acts 17:11 – *“Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”*
 17. Acts 20:27 – *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”*
 18. Acts 20:28-31 – *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”*
 19. Galatians 1:8-9 – *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”*
 20. Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches that God gave the church Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to edify (build up spiritually) Christians, and to facilitate spiritual growth so that every child of God can properly function.
 21. Ephesians 6:4 – *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*
 22. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 – *“The Lord’s bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...”*
 23. 2 Timothy 4:2-4 – *“...preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”*
 24. Titus 1:9 – *“...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”*
- v. The principle found in Scripture is undeniable...
 1. God has revealed His will.
 2. He has entrusted His will to teachers.
 3. Teachers must teach it accurately.
 4. People examine and understand it.
 5. Error and contradictions are identified and corrected.
 6. God’s people are brought back into conformity with the revealed standard.
 - vi. That’s restoration! The teacher is NEVER tasked with reinventing God’s will. Simply stated, he must faithfully communicate, preserve, defend, and apply what God has revealed. The possibility of restoration is built into the provisions God has made for revealing, teaching, preserving, and correcting His people according to His will.
- b. Where is the restoration principle found in the Old Testament?

- i. The Old Law addresses the possibility of restoration.
 - 1. Deuteronomy 4:2 – *“You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”*
 - 2. Deuteronomy 5:32-33 – *“So you shall observe to do just as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess.”*
 - 3. Please note that God’s law clearly establishes an ORIGINAL revealed standard: Obey God and keep His commandments. The objective is not merely sincerity. It is faithfulness to God’s will. (This is critical when confronting modern day criticisms of the restoration principle.)
- ii. The Old Law anticipates that Israel will depart.
 - 1. Deuteronomy 31:16 – *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.’”*
 - 2. Deuteronomy 31:20 – *“For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.”*
 - 3. Deuteronomy 31:29 – *“For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”*
 - 4. Restoration demands an original intent and a departure from that original intent. God’s Law clearly anticipates the departure.
- iii. The Old Law anticipates the return.
 - 1. Deuteronomy 30:1-3 – *“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will RESTORE you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.”*
 - 2. Notice what happens. You have an original intent, departure from that intent, consequences for the departure, a return to obedience, and RESTORATION. The pattern of departure, return and restoration is established in God’s Law before Israel even enters the Promised Land.
- iv. Returning means returning to the original revealed standard.
 - 1. Deuteronomy 30:8 – *“And you shall again obey the Lord, and observe all His commandments which I commanded you today.”*

2. The answer to departure is not creating a new system. It is returning to God's original revealed standard.
- v. The Old Law established the means for correcting violations.
 1. Deuteronomy 17:8-13 teaches that when difficult issues arise, *"you shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the Lord chooses..."*
 2. The Law provided the means for determining, "What does God's revealed standard require here?"
- vi. Don't forget that the Old Law required that the Law would be continually taught.
 1. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Deuteronomy 31:12-13 shows that the Old Law didn't simply give revelation. It established a system for teaching, remembering, obeying, and preserving revelation from God.
- vii. The Old Testament gives us multiple examples of this restoration principle.
 1. The Judges
 - a. When the people entered the Promised Land, and after Joshua died, what happened? Judges 2:10 tells us that the very next generation "did not know the Lord."
 - b. It was a very dark period in the history of Israel. Judges 21:25 sums it up by stating: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
 - c. Therefore, Judges records a recurring cycle of Israel's departure, oppression, crying out, deliverance, and subsequent departure again. This cycle appears repeatedly... (Judges 2:11, Judges 3:7, Judges 3:12, Judges 4:1, Judges 6:1, Judges 10:6, Judges 13:1)
 - d. The pattern is essentially:
 - i. Israel does evil.
 - ii. God allows oppression. (As promised in Deuteronomy 28.)
 - iii. Israel cries out.
 - iv. God raises a deliverer—a judge.
 - v. Israel is delivered.
 - vi. Israel does evil again.
 - e. Judges 2:18-19 – *"When the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judged died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways."*
 2. Samuel
 - a. 1 Samuel 7:3-6
 - b. Israel had departed from the Lord. Samuel tells them to "return to the Lord with all your heart". And Israel confesses, "We have sinned against the Lord."
 3. Asa
 - a. 2 Chronicles 14-15

- 9

- b.** They brought the book before the people. Ezra read from it. The people were attentive to it. The Levites explained the law to the people. And what did the people do? They wept!
 - c.** Why did they weep? They knew that they had not obeyed the word of God.
 - 8. The Prophets**
 - a.** From Isaiah-Malachi, we have multiple examples where God uses His servants to warn His people to return to Him before it is too late.
 - b.** Consider Joel's Prophecy
 - i.** Joel prophesies during a devastating crisis in Judah. Joel describes the problem as something so severe that the people are called to recognize it as a "day of the lord" (Joel 1:15; 2:1-2).
 - ii.** But Joel's message is not simply about the destruction itself. The devastation becomes a call for God's people to return to Him. The problem is a spiritual problem. Therefore, the solution must be a spiritual solution.
 - iii.** Joel 2:12-13 – *"Yer even now,' declares the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.' Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil."*
 - 1.** Notice the emphasis: "Return to Me." Restoration always begins with a return to God.
 - 2.** God does not merely call His people to regret what has happened or to repair the damage that has been done. He calls them to return to Him with all their heart.
 - 3.** And notice the contrast between the heart and the outward garment. God is not looking for just some sort of external show of restoration. He wants genuine repentance that begins in the heart and produces a real return to Him.
 - iv.** Joel 2:14 – *"Who knows whether He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him..."*
 - 1.** The possibility of restoration is grounded in the character of God. Joel reminds the people that God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness."
 - 2.** The call of God through Joel is not just to "fix what has been broken". It is, "Return to Me. Come back."
 - c.** Where is the restoration principle found in the New Testament?
 - i.** Simon the Sorcerer
 - 1.** Acts 8:18-24 tells us a story about Simon the sorcerer. Like many of the Samaritans, Simon was converted as a result of the preaching of Philip. However, when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was passed to other Christians when the apostles laid their hands on them, he coveted the power that the apostles were given.

2. Peter rebuked him sharply in Acts 8:20. *“But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.’”*
 3. Simon’s response, in verse 24, indicates a penitent heart. This story demonstrates the biblical pattern of departure, correction, and a call to repentance. It shows that a Christian who has departed from God’s will is not simply told that he is wrong; he is called to return.
- ii.** “Restore such a one...”
1. Galatians 6:1 – *“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”*
 2. The word translated “restore” (*katartizo*) carries the idea of mending, repairing, or bringing something back into a proper condition. While the context of Galatians speaks to an individual restoration, and not a broader movement, one can still see the principle. God’s will was being upheld, then violated, and the command is for spiritual men to help the wayward to mend their relationship with God.
- iii.** “Retain the standard of sound words...”
1. 2 Timothy 1:13-14 – *“Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”*
 2. The word standard (*hypotyposis*) is important when we consider the restoration principle. The word can refer to a pattern, outline, model, or standard—something that provides a form to be followed. Paul is telling Timothy to hold firmly to the pattern of sound words he had received.
 - a. This implies two important truths: (1) there is a standard, and (2) that standard can be departed from. Paul’s emphasis on “sound words” also demonstrates that not all teaching is faithful to the truth. There is sound doctrine that must be retained and guarded, and there is teaching that can lead God’s people away from that standard.
 - b. Therefore, the restoration principle begins with a simple biblical premise: God has revealed a standard for His people, and when that standard is abandoned, the answer is to return to it—not to create a new standard.
- iv.** “All Scripture is inspired...”
1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*
 2. This is another important text when we consider the restoration principle. While we could focus on several important words and arguments from this text, consider the word “correction”.
 - a. Why does restoration require a standard? Because we cannot determine whether something is a departure from God’s will unless we first know what

God's will is. You cannot restore something to its proper condition unless you have a standard by which its proper condition can be determined.

- b.** Scripture provides that standard. Paul describes Scripture as the instrument by which God's people are taught, reprov'd, corrected, and trained in righteousness. That makes Scripture indispensable to identifying and correcting departure from God's will.
- c.** This is the essence of the restoration principle:
 - i.** God reveals His will.
 - ii.** People can depart from that will.
 - iii.** Scripture identifies the departure.
 - iv.** God's people are called to correct it and return to His revealed will.
- v.** "One turns him back..."
 - 1.** James 5:19-20 – *"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."*
 - 2.** This is the restoration principle in action, as applied to an individual.
 - a.** One "strays from the truth".
 - b.** One "turns him back".
 - c.** The sinner is turned from the error of his way.
 - 3.** This is restoration!
- vi.** "The one who abides in the teaching..."
 - 1.** 2 John 9 – *"Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son."*
 - 2.** Notice that the principle here is not simply believing in Jesus. The immediate context addresses those who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. John's concern is both who Jesus is and what Jesus taught. To belong to Christ is to abide in His teaching.
 - 3.** John therefore presents a boundary to Christian faith: we must not go beyond the teaching of Christ, nor depart from it. The identity of Christ and the teaching of Christ cannot be separated.
 - 4.** This is important to the restoration principle because you cannot restore what you have no standard for, and you cannot abide in Christ while abandoning His teaching. Restoration calls us back not merely to a person, but to the teaching that He delivered. In other words, you cannot divorce the plan from the man. We cannot claim to follow Christ while disregarding the teachings of Christ.
- vii.** Three of the Seven Churches in Asia
 - 1.** Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7
 - a.** The church in Ephesus was commended for their toil, perseverance, doctrinal discernment, and stand against false teachers. They had not simply abandoned the truth. In many ways, they were doing what Christ expected them to do.
 - i.** But something had changed. In the midst of their faithfulness, they had left the love they had at first.

- 13

- i. Restoration begins with an honest assessment, and recognition that we have departed from where the Lord wants us to be.
 - ii. Laodicea could not be restored until they were willing to see themselves as God saw them. God wanted them to change.
 - c. Revelation 3:19 – *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent.”*
 - i. The word “repent” means a change of mind that results in a change of direction. The Lord was not content simply to identify their condition; He called them to turn from it.
 - ii. Jesus is addressing a church that has become spiritually compromised, and He calls them to respond to His voice and restore their fellowship with Him.
 - d. Revelation 3:20 – *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me.”*
 - e. Laodicea demonstrates the restoration principle. God called them to recognize, repent, and renew their fellowship with Him. They had convinced themselves that they were already where they needed to be. The Lord showed them otherwise and called them to return.
 - f. Restoration demands humility. We cannot return to where we ought to be if we refuse to acknowledge where we are.
- d. So, when we talk about the restoration principle, we are not importing a nineteenth-century concept into Scripture. We are recognizing a pattern that Scripture itself repeatedly gives us: God reveals His will, His people depart from it, God identifies the departure, and He calls His people to return.
 - i. The question is no longer whether the Bible contains a restoration principle. The evidence is abundant and clear.
 - ii. The question becomes how that principle should be understood and applied—and that is where the modern criticisms begin.

III. What are modern criticisms of the restoration principle?

a. The Legalistic Criticism

- i. The Criticism: Traditional restorationist patternism has often treated the New Testament as a divine architectural blueprint, requiring Christians to piece together commands, examples, and necessary inferences to reconstruct a legally binding pattern for the church.
- ii. The Perspective:
 - 1. Richard T. Hughes, in *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, argues that church leaders such as Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone, pillars of the Restoration Movement, used methods similar to Francis Bacon’s scientific method and Scottish Common-Sense Realism to approach the Bible and matters of faith. Hughes argues that these intellectual influences contributed to a rationalistic approach to Scripture that tended to emphasize objective biblical facts, logical deduction, and precise conformity to a biblical pattern, at the expense of mystery, transcendence, and theological interpretation.
 - a. He essentially makes at least four important claims for consideration...

- i. First, he claims that Restoration Movement leaders treated the Bible as a “facts-only” laboratory.
 - 1. Hughes states that Campbell and his contemporaries applied Francis Bacon’s scientific method to Scripture.
 - 2. He argues that Scriptural passages were viewed as raw empirical data points rather than a narrative of divine drama or paradoxical mystery.
 - 3. The Bible reader was expected to collect “biblical facts,” classify them objectively, and arrive at clear, undeniable conclusions regarding church organization, worship, and salvation.
- ii. Next, he claims that Restoration Movement leaders reduced faith to a blueprint (Legalistic Patternism).
 - 1. Because Baconian logic assumes that facts yield fixed, reproductive formulas, Restorationists approached the New Testament as a precise blueprint, or legal handbook, for the church.
 - 2. He argues that mystery, grace, and divine transcendence were superseded by a search for explicit commands, apostolic examples, and necessary inferences (the CENI framework).
 - 3. As a result, truth became synonymous with correct constitutional alignment: If a church followed the precise external pattern of the 1st Century, it possessed the truth.
- iii. Third, he claims that this approach stripped away mysticism and spiritual ambiguity.
 - 1. But insisting that divine truth must be clear, rational, and accessible to human reason via Common Sense Realism, Restorationists minimize elements of faith that cannot be categorized scientifically.
 - 2. The work of the Holy Spirit is often restricted to “the written word” that was revealed by the Holy Spirit, removing direct, mystical, or unexplainable spiritual experiences.
 - 3. Furthermore, Hughes argues that this approach reduced God’s divine sovereignty, grace, and God’s overall nature to human logic and legal requirements. If God operated strictly through revealed “rules,” human intellect could master and control the terms of salvation.
- iv. Finally, he claims that this approach created, and perpetuated, overconfidence in human objectivity.
 - 1. Baconianism instilled a conviction that an honest mind, free from denominational bias, could read the Bible and arrive at the exact same objective conclusions as anyone else. Hughes argues that this stripped away theological humility.

2. Therefore, it reduced God’s infinite nature to what could be systematically proven through human logic.
 3. He argues that this led to severe fragmentation and division within the Restoration Movement. He claims that every theological disagreement was framed not as a mystery of divine variation, but as a failure of one part to follow the “facts”.
- b. Consider the following quotes from Richard T. Hughes...
- i. “Restorationists embraced Baconian inductivism as the proper scientific method for interpreting the Bible. In this view, the Bible was a book of objective, empirical facts—much like the natural world was a collection of physical facts for the natural scientist.” (Hughes, p. 26)
 - ii. “Just as the natural scientist observed facts, classified them, and deduced the laws of nature, so the biblical scholar was to collect biblical facts, classify them, and deduce the laws of God.” (Hughes, p. 26)
 - iii. “Alexander Campbell was convinced that if men and women would only set aside their human opinions, creeds, and speculations, and simply gather the facts of Scripture using the scientific method, they would all arrive at the exact same conclusions.” (Hughes, p. 28)
 - iv. “The Baconian hermeneutic transformed the New Testament from a story of divine grace and mystery into a constitution, a legal charter, or a blueprint for the church.” (Hughes, p. 80)
 - v. “In Campbell’s hands, theology was replaced by a precise system of biblical Patternism. Faith was no longer an encounter with a transcendent, mysterious God, but an intellectual assent to verified biblical facts.” (Hughes, p. 81)
 - vi. “By reducing divine revelation to a set of clear, empirical data points, the Restorationists effectively banished mystery, paradox, and ambiguity from the Christian faith.” (Hughes, p. 82)
 - vii. “The work of the Holy Spirit was largely confined to the written word—the ‘word-only’ theory. In this rationalist framework, God acted predictably through statutory rules, leaving little room for mystical experience or the unpredictable, sovereign activity of the Spirit.” (Hughes, p. 83)
 - viii. “The ultimate ironic result of this scientific approach was that in trying to exalt the Bible, it flattened Scripture into a technical manual and reduced the transcendent God to a predictable lawgiver operating within the bounds of human logic.” (Hughes, p. 84)
2. John Mark Hicks, in *Searching For The Pattern: My Journey In Interpreting The Bible*, emphasizes that the New Testament epistles are contextual, pastoral, letters written to messy, developing churches—not a formal, systematic legal code.

- a. His overall thesis directly critiques the “blueprint hermeneutic” (common in traditional Restorationist theology), offering an alternative for how Christians read the New Testament epistles. He essentially makes three arguments...
 - i. First, he rejects the New Testament epistles as a “Systematic Legal Code”.
 - 1. He details how traditional interpretations treat New Testament letters as if they were a unified, systematic legal manual or constitutional blueprint for church governance and worship practices.
 - 2. He argues that this approach fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the epistles. He claims that reading the New Testament letters as legal code treats them as context-free statutes where commands, examples, and necessary inferences must be extracted and synthesized into a strict legal system. He argues that the apostles were not writing a regulatory manual or a new “Torah of church order”; they were apply the gospel to dynamic, specific situations.
 - ii. Second, he emphasizes that the Epistles are Occasional, Pastoral, and Contextual.
 - 1. Hicks emphasizes the “occasionality” of the Epistles. They are real letters addressing specific, messy local situations.
 - 2. Letters like 1 Corinthians and Galatians were written to address specific pastoral emergencies—such as division, false teachings, ethical failure, and cultural tensions.
 - 3. He then emphasizes pastoral application over legal rule—claiming that Paul and other apostolic writers do not issue cold, abstract legal mandates; rather, they demonstrate how to reason theological-pastoral responses to messy local circumstances grounded in the story of Jesus.
 - iii. Next, he emphasizes the need to shift from a “Blueprint” to a “Narrative Theological Pattern”.
 - 1. Instead of searching for a legal pattern hidden inside the epistles, Hicks argues that the true “pattern” revealed in Scripture is the narrative of God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. The Epistles are examples of first-century leaders teaching messy congregations how to embody and perform the Gospel narrative in their concrete context.
 - 3. Hicks calls on modern readers not to copy the local first-century cultural applications as rigid laws, but to imitate the theological logic and pastoral heart of the apostles in addressing today’s messy church environments.
- b. Consider the following quotes from John Mark Hicks...

- i. “A blueprint hermeneutic reads the Bible looking for a timeless rule-prescribed pattern that obligates all churches in the future... The church in the New Testament followed this pattern; therefore, all churches must follow that pattern... The move to a theological hermeneutic says, ‘We don’t read this book like it’s a detailed rule book. We read it like it’s a story into which we’re invited to participate. The story is the main thing, not the detailed pattern.’” (Hicks, p. 12)
 - ii. “It is essentially the idea that the Bible contains a measuring stick of what a ‘true church’ is and has specific details of what that looks like... We move to a theological hermeneutic that says, ‘We don’t read this book like it’s a detailed rule book. We read it like it’s a story into which we’re invited to participate.’” (Hicks, p. 22)
 - iii. “The problem is the local of the pattern. The pattern is not found in an implied blueprint in Acts and the Epistles. Paul does not call people to obedience based on a blueprint located in the practices of the church... The pattern of God’s work through Christ in the power of the Spirit is explicit, objective, and formative.” (Hicks, p. 64)
 - iv. “I am a patternist in that Jesus is the pattern. God’s work is the pattern. We want to imitate God and we want to do what God does in the world. Is it a pattern shaped by story, so we enter into the drama, or is it a pattern that is a kind of edict that says, ‘Do these things exactly like this?’” (Hicks, p. 78)
 - v. “We recognize the occasionality of Scripture, but we perceive its narrative theological unity and embrace those values in our contemporary setting.” (Hicks, p. 118)
 - vi. “We move from the question of ‘What does God require of us?’ to ‘What is the story into which God invites us? How can I participate in that story?’” (Hicks, p. 142)
- 3. F. Lagard Smith, in *Radical Restoration: A Call For Pure and Simple Christianity*, warns that a fixation on the “blueprint” breeds a Pharisaical spirit. He meticulously critiques “patternism” when it comes to emphasizing the mechanics of worship over the heart of worship.
 - a. Smith claims that traditional Restorationist patternism has prioritized institutional structure, liturgical mechanics, and legalistic rule-keeping over the personal, relational, and heart-centered nature of worship.
 - i. He warns that when a movement becomes fixated on an external “blueprint”, such as rigid worship formats, church buildings, and official church order, it easily breeds a pharisaical spirit—elevating human traditions and legal precision above real discipleship, spontaneous community, and love.
 - b. Consider the following quotes from F. Lagard Smith...
 - i. “We have taken a vibrant, living organism and turned it into a rigid, institutional organization. In our quest for restoration, we have too

often mistaken the blueprint for the building, and the mechanics of church order for the heart of true worship.” (Smith, p. 34)

- ii. “Is it any wonder, then, that though Scripture never offers us the ‘five steps of salvation’ or ‘five acts of worship,’ we have constructed an entire hermeneutic around extracting explicit mechanics from implicit hints? In doing so, we have made the Gospel seem more like an obstacle course of legal compliance than an invitation into grace.” (Smith, pp. 79-80)
- iii. “When the primary test of faithful worship becomes the precision of our mechanics rather than the posture of our hearts, we miss the entire point of coming before God. God is not seeking liturgical perfectionists; He is seeking true worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth.” (Smith, p. 122)
- iv. “We have become experts at ensuring every piece of the worship puzzle is technically correct while completely ignoring the absence of love, joy, and authentic community. We perform our five acts like spiritual technicians, assuming God is pleased simply because we kept the rules.” (Smith, p. 145)
- v. “A fixation on the blueprint inevitably breeds a pharisaical spirit. It causes us to look outward at others with a magnifying glass of legal scrutiny rather than looking inward at our own hearts with a mirror of grace. We begin to gauge faithfulness by how strictly someone adheres to our preferred pattern rather than their transformation into the image of Christ.” (Smith, p. 198)
- vi. “The moment we equate our system of restoration with the Kingdom itself; we fall into the ancient trap of religious pride. Like the Pharisees of old, we strain out gnats of worship methodology while swallowing camels of division, arrogance, and spiritual apathy.” (Smith, p. 203)

b. The Historical Criticism

- i. The Criticism: Traditional restorationism often claims to bypass all church history, leaping straight from the 21st century back to the 1st century. Therefore, there is a lot of ignorance of “our own 19th century roots.”
- ii. The Perspective:
 - 1. Richard T. Hughes, in *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, attempts to demonstrate that churches of Christ did not just “discover” their theology in a vacuum. Instead, their hermeneutics were deeply shaped by 19th-century American ideals: Enlightenment rationalism, Jacksonian democracy, and post-Civil War Southern sectionalism.
 - a. Hughes argues that failing to realize we are wearing 19th-century cultural glasses makes us blind to our own biases.
 - i. Hughes says that churches committed to restoration are susceptible to: “the illusion that they have escaped the influence of history and culture altogether.” (Hughes, p. 10)

- ii. He places the restoration impulse inside a particular American cultural moment. He writes: “This vision flourished especially in the heady, utopian climate of the early nineteenth century when Churches of Christ in America first began.” (Hughes, p. 10)
 - iii. He examines Alexander Campbell’s intellectual world and explains how Baconianism, Locke, and Scottish Common-Sense Realism contributed to Campbell’s approach to Scripture. He claims that, for Campbell, the Bible functioned as: “a kind of scientific manual or technical blueprint...” for determining primitive theology and the primitive church. (Hughes, pp. 30-32)
 - iv. Hughes argues that the combination of primitivism and American philosophy culturally conditioned Campbell’s hermeneutics. He describes the theological foundation that eventually distinguished the Churches of Christ as involving: “traditional Christian primitivism combined with Scottish Common-Sense Realism and Lockean epistemology.” (Hughes, p. 48)
 - 1. Hughes is not saying: “They were Americans; therefore, they had American biases.”
 - 2. He is identifying specific intellectual traditions that became intertwined with their restoration theology: Primitive Christianity + Scottish Common-Sense Realism + Lockean epistemology = a particular way of understanding Scripture.
 - v. Hughes discusses David Lipscomb and notes that he: “routinely employed the Baconian common sense method of Bible interpretation.” (Hughes, p. 120)
- 2. John Mark Hicks, in an essay in the *Journal of Christian Studies* 4.2, highlights how early restoration leaders like Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone actually held much broader views of the kingdom that were later flattened into narrow, institutional debates.
 - a. When explaining how his view of restoration changed, He says: “Whereas once I understood restoration as primarily the reproduction of the church as it appears in the New Testament, I have shifted toward a broader—and, at the same time, deeper—understanding of restoration.” (Hicks, pp. 29-42)
 - b. He then claims: “Restoration as reproduction is too narrow and inferential.” (Hicks, pp. 29-42)
 - c. He then goes on to describe restoration as the renewal of God’s intent for creation and the renewal of God’s story in our lives.
- c. The Christological Criticism
 - i. The Criticism: In the zeal to restore the “true church,” the church itself—its name, its structural organization, its five acts of worship—becomes the primary object of proclamation and the boundary of salvation.
 - ii. The Perspective:

1. Hughes, Hicks, and Smith criticize forms of traditional restorationism for allowing ecclesiology—the identity, structure, organization, and practices of the church—to become so central that it can overshadow the person and work of Jesus Christ.
2. They argue that the gospel message is fundamentally about the narrative of Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, and lordship—not a message about finding the correctly organized local church.
- iii. Consider the following quotes...
 1. “Jesus is the pattern. Jesus is the Word of God—our pattern, the speech of God. And the incarnated Word of God embodies who God is and what God desires.” (Hicks, p. 181)
 2. “While the exact manner in which this plays out in our lives and in our churches often remains relatively, though not absolutely, ambiguous and imprecise, our central confession of the gospel is clear and sure. And that is the pattern!” (Hicks, p. 194)
 3. “Ironically, it is we who continue to worry more about whether we are doctrinally restored than about whether we are spiritually restored.” (Smith, p. 73)
 4. “Jesus himself was a pattern.” (Smith, p. 73-80)
- d. The Hermeneutical Criticism
 - i. The Criticism: The way traditional Restorationist patternism employs commands, examples, and inferences to determine what is universally binding can be inconsistent and selectively applied.
 - ii. The Perspective:
 1. John Mark Hicks, in *Searching for The Pattern: My Journey In Interpreting The Bible*, advocates for a shift from a “blueprint hermeneutic” to a “theological/narrative hermeneutic.” He argues that traditionalism enforces certain cultural practices as binding laws while dismissing others as merely cultural.
 - a. For example, Hicks might argue that specific ways to partake of the Lord’s Supper are strictly cultural and should not be bound. And to prove his point, he would argue that those who follow a “blueprint hermeneutic” would never bind biblical concepts such as the holy kiss, foot-washing, or selling all of one’s property and possessions to feed the poor. He would argue that we view all of those items as strictly cultural.
 - b. Therefore, Hicks main argument is the inconsistency that he sees in treating the Bible as a “blueprint”.
 2. F. Lagard Smith, in books like *Who Is My Brother?*, points out the logical knots the church ties itself in when trying to legally define “scriptural silence.” He argues that the restoration principle should be used to protect the core gospel, not to create microscopic tests of fellowship over non-essential details.
 - iii. Consider the following...
 1. “What I once thought was simple in terms of ‘simply obeying they Bible’ did not turn out to be so simple.” (Hicks, p.79-80)
 - a. In this part of Hick’s book, he describes what initially appears to be a simply method but becomes increasingly complicated because the interpreter has to make judgments about which commands, examples, and necessary inferences are binding.

- b. He later summarizes the problem even more explicitly: the blueprint approach requires decisions about when an example is binding, when a command excludes a coordinate, and when an inference becomes a line of fellowship. (Hicks, p. 79-80)
 - c. He describes this as the method becoming “complicated by extra-biblical hermeneutical rules” that seek to identify a blueprint that is not actually articulated in the text.
- 2. “...the conclusion that the church may only help Christians did not sit well with my gut.” (Hicks, p. 88-90)
 - a. Hicks describes his struggle over the conclusion that the church could only use its resources to help Christians. The traditional CENI/blueprint method appeared to produce that conclusion because there was no command, example, or necessary inference authorizing assistance to non-Christians.
 - b. Hicks is not ultimately appealing to his feelings. He asks why the conclusion generated by the hermeneutic seems inconsistent with the larger biblical story. He later writes: “I knew I could not always trust my gut.”
 - c. His concern was not that Scripture was wrong, but that the hermeneutical method had generated a conclusion inconsistent with Scripture’s broader revelation of God.
- 3. “...a theological hermeneutic reads the Bible to learn the heart, nature, and work of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.” (Hicks, p. 112)
 - a. Hicks essentially defines a theological hermeneutic not by asking, “What does the church have to do?” But “What does this text reveal about God, and how does God’s redemptive work in Christ shape the way God’s people live?” (Hicks, pp. 100-103)
 - b. He would argue that a “blueprint hermeneutic” is focused on the prescribed practice while the “theological hermeneutic” is focused on the nature of God and how God’s nature changes us.
- 4. “...the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus the Messiah...” (Hicks, p. 101)
 - a. Hicks would argue that his theological hermeneutic isn’t simply “be more theological.” It is Christological. The above quote follows a discussion of Paul, and points to God’s redemptive work finding its fullness in Jesus. (Hicks, pp. 96-101)
 - b. Hicks is not eliminating the concept of pattern; he is relocating “the pattern”. Instead of “pattern = reconstructed congregation blueprint, he argues “pattern = God’s redemptive activity in Christ.”
 - c. He later summarizes the distinction: “The pattern is not found in an implied blueprint in Acts and the Epistles.” (Hicks, p. 101) He argues that Paul calls believers to obedience based upon the pattern manifested in Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation.
- 5. “...the heart, nature, and work of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit...” (Hicks, pp. 112-113)

- a. This is, perhaps, the clearest definition of Hicks’ “theological hermeneutic.” He would argue that this is where his shift becomes theological rather than methodological.
 - b. He is asking the interpreter to read Scripture with attention to the identity, character, actions, redemptive purposes, of God, as well as Jesus as the center of that story, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the formation of God’s people.
- 6. “What does the ministry, mission, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus reveal about God’s purposes for his people?” (Hicks, pp. 133-136)
 - a. In his book, Hicks develops the idea that Jesus, not the first-century church, is the pattern. He argues that Israel and even the churches described in the New Testament are not themselves the ultimate image of God. Jesus is.
 - b. Therefore, Hicks would argue that the question changes from “What did the first-century do?” to “What does the ministry, mission, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus reveal about God’s purposes for his people?”
- 7. “Everyone uses commands, examples, and inferences in some form.” (Hicks, pp. 142-147)
 - a. Hicks does not say that “Commands, examples, and inferences are useless.”
 - b. The question, in his mind, is not whether or not commands, examples, and inferences are used. “The question is not whether we use them, but how we use them.” (Hicks, pp. 142-143)
- 8. Hicks ultimately argues that if Jesus is the pattern, then the Christian task is not merely reproducing first-century practices. It is learning to embody the character and mission of Jesus in our own setting. (Hicks, pp. 177-184)
 - a. Therefore, Hicks argues that we need to move away from perfect conformity to a more specific system of moral virtues: “To love God and neighbor...” and to pursue “justice, mercy, and humility...” (Hicks, p. 178-179)
- e. The Relational Criticism
 - i. The Criticism: The Restoration Movement began as a plea for Christian unity, but critics argue that when the restoration principle became tied to rigid patternism, it functioned instead as an engine of continuing division.
 - ii. The Perspective:
 - 1. Richard T. Hughes & John Mark Hicks criticize the restoration principle for fostering a deeply sectarian spirit that isolates churches of Christ from other “Christian” religious groups. They argue that by making total doctrinal alignment on structural issues the basis for fellowship, the movement abandoned its original plea for Christian unity.
 - 2. F. Lagard Smith challenges the tradition to reconsider who is recognized as a brother or sister in Christ, arguing that faith in Jesus and baptism should be the baseline for fellowship, rather than perfect agreement on localized church government or noninstitutional patterns.
 - iii. Consider the following...

1. Hughes plainly claims that restoration began as a plea for unity but ultimately developed a sectarian mechanism. His central observation is that churches of Christ, historically speaking, have divided and subdivided into numerous branches.
 - a. In his discussion of Alexander Campbell's early restorationism, Hughes states that "the restoration of primitive Christianity was the only means to the unity of all Christians." (Hughes, p. 31)
 - b. Hughes shows that Campbell's restoration principle was originally instrumental to unity: restore primitive Christianity so that Christians can get beyond denominational creeds and unite.
 - c. But Hughes argues that something changed. Restoration increasingly ceased to function simply as a means toward unity and became a way of identifying the correct church.
 - d. He says, "from the 1840s, if not before, we can trace the beginnings of an emerging sect called the 'Church of Christ.'" (Hughes, p. 31)
 - e. He then contrasts this "emerging church of Christ" with Campbell's broader ecumenical vision: "...it was far more concerned with questions regarding 'the true church' and 'the ancient order' than it was with ecumenicity or human progress." (Hughes, p. 31)
2. "If one gathered all the facts and followed all the instructions of the Book in precise detail, one could rightfully claim to have no theology but the Bible, no creed but the Bible, no organization schemes other than the biblical pattern, and, indeed, once could rightfully claim that one's church was no denomination as all but the true church of the first age." (Hughes, p. 68)
 - a. Hughes argues that Campbell was heavily influenced by Scottish Common-Sense Realism, Baconian inductive reasoning, and Lockean epistemology. That combination produced tremendous confidence that careful examination of biblical facts could yield a clear, objective system of Christianity."
 - b. Hughes is connecting this directly to the development of the restoration principle.
 - c. Notice the progression: Facts → instructions → precise detail → biblical pattern → our church = true church.
 - i. Once that happens, the restoration principle isn't merely saying: "Let's return to Scripture."
 - ii. It becomes: "Let's determine precisely what Scripture requires, and then determine who has correctly reconstructed it."
 - iii. This is how Hughes argues for restoration equating to sectarian boundary-making.
3. John Mark Hicks essentially asks: Why does the pattern keep producing disagreements if the pattern is supposed to be obvious?
 - a. He describes his former approach as searching Acts and the Epistles for: "an implicit blueprint for the work and worship of the church..." and using: "generic/specific distinctions, coordinate associations, the law of silence,

- and expediency...” to move from biblical commands, examples, and inferences toward a blueprint. (Hicks, p. 173)
- b. He then goes on to say that the blueprint “then became the standard of faithfulness and a mark of the true church.” (Hicks, p. 173)
 - c. He then adds, “And if everyone agreed upon and practiced the blueprint, we would be united.!” (Hicks, p. 173)
4. Hicks claims that the fundamental problem is that the blueprint is constructed. He claims that the problem was that “every conclusion and most steps along the way were inferences.” (Hicks, pp. 79-104)
- a. He then states, “As distinctions accumulated and inferences abounded, I began to realize the blueprint was more the product of human rationalization than it was explicit in God’s story.”
 - b. “It did not appear on the surface of the text, and if it was in the text, its pieces were scattered across a wide field.”
5. Hicks says the blueprint hermeneutic “constructs what does not itself appear in the text as a detailed, specific, and exclusive pattern.” (Hicks, pp. 142-143)
- a. He goes on to say: “That framework generates an exclusive system one does not find in Scripture itself.”
 - b. Ultimately, Hicks uses the Lord’s Supper as an example to make his point. In regard to partaking of the Lord’s Supper weekly, exclusively on Sunday, Hicks states: “To generate a positive law that the church must eat every week and only on Sunday is the effect of the received blueprint hermeneutic.” (Hicks, pp. 159-162)
6. Hicks also comments about the institutional-noninstitutional division. As he explains that commands, examples, and necessary inferences are not the problem, he says, “The question is not whether we use them, but how we use them and how we then correlate the data.” (Hicks, pp. 142-143)
- a. He then points out that how they were used created “the occasion for the divide between institutional and non-institutional congregations.”
- iv. The ultimate irony for these authors is that the restoration principle was supposed to end division. They claim it only created more division.
- f. At this point, we need to make an important distinction. These criticisms may expose genuine weaknesses, inconsistencies, and historical failures in the way restoration has sometimes been understood and practiced. But exposing problems in restorationism does not necessarily disprove the biblical principle of restoration. We need to distinguish between the principle itself and the methods, traditions, assumptions, and applications that have sometimes been attached to it.
- i. In other words, the question is not simply, “Have restorationists every been legalistic?” Of course they have! No, “Have churches that follow strict Restoration Movement principles ever divided?” They have. Not, “Have we sometimes confused our traditions with the will of God?” We have.
 - ii. The deeper question is this: Do these failures mean that the biblical call to return to God’s revealed will is itself invalid?

IV. How do we respond to the modern criticisms of the restoration principle?

- a. Our response must not be that every historical form of restorationism was correct. Our response is that the criticisms of the restoration principle must be tested against Scripture just as restorationism itself must be tested against Scripture. So, how can we respond to “The Legalistic Criticism” of the restoration principle?
- i. First, God’s grace does not eliminate obedience.
 1. Matthew 7:21 – Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”
 2. Matthew 19:17 – “And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’”
 3. Matthew 28:19-20 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”
 4. Luke 6:46 – “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”
 5. John 12:47-48 – “If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”
 6. John 14:15 – “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”
 7. John 14:21 – “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”
 8. John 14:23-24 – “Jesus answered and sat to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.’”
 9. John 15:10 – “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”
 - ii. Second, obedience does not constitute legalism.
 1. Legalism is not taking God’s commands seriously; legalism involves distorting obedience—such as binding human requirements as though they were God’s commands, restricting God’s authorization beyond what Scripture warrants, or treating human works as the basis upon which we earn God’s acceptance.
 2. Contrary to popular opinion, the Pharisees were NEVER rebuked by Jesus for keeping God’s law too strictly.
 - a. Matthew 23:23 – “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”
 - b. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for not keeping the law strictly enough! They were rebuked for being disobedient to the law. They were condemned because their obedience was distorted—sometimes by human tradition, sometimes by selective emphasis, and sometimes by hypocrisy.

- c. The answer to legalism is not less obedience. It is faithful obedience without adding to or subtracting from God's will.
 - 3. Third, restoration seeks submission to the authority of Jesus, not salvation by human merit.
- b. How can we respond to "The Historical Criticism" of the restoration principle?
 - i. First, we must acknowledge that sometimes historical distortions do exist.
 - 1. The Restoration Movement was populated by men who lived in a particular time, with a particular historical and cultural environment. They had to apply biblical principles to their cultural environment. And so do we.
 - 2. Therefore, their conclusions must be examined rather than automatically equated with Scripture.
 - ii. But the existence of historical distortions does not invalidate the biblical principle of restoration.
 - iii. There is a big difference between criticizing the Restoration Movement and criticizing restoration as a biblical concept.
 - 1. Jeremiah 6:16 – "Thus says the Lord, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls...'"
 - a. Notice that Jeremiah does not say, "Find whatever is old and reproduce it." He says to ask for the ancient paths, identify the good way, and walk in it."
 - 2. Joel calls Israel to return to God (Joel 2:12-14). Jesus repeatedly called people back to God's original intention rather than to follow some human tradition (Matthew 15:1-9, 19:3-8). The churches in Revelation are called to return and repent (Revelation 2-3). Restoration is all over the Bible.
 - iv. The possibility that some nineteenth-century restorationists may have confused their historical assumptions with biblical revelation only strengthens the case for careful restoration!
 - 1. In fact, the historical criticism can become an argument for restoration rather than against it. If Restorationists have sometimes confused their historical assumptions with biblical revelation, the answer is not to abandon restoration but to apply the restoration principle more carefully—to ourselves!
 - v. The Restoration Movement is NOT the authority for our lives! We follow the word of God!
 - 1. We are not defending Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, or every nineteenth-century conclusion. And we are not defending every 1950's or 1960's conclusion.
 - 2. We are defending the idea that Christians should continually measure their beliefs and practices to what the Bible actually says.
- c. How can we respond to "The Christological Criticism" of the restoration principle?
 - i. I agree that Jesus is the pattern. And because Jesus is the Lord of His church, He revealed will for His church matters.
 - 1. Therefore, the appropriate alternative to a Christ-centered restoration is not a Christ-less restoration. The restorationist claim is that Christians restore the teaching and practice of Christ precisely because they belong to Christ.
 - 2. Christ has all authority. (Matthew 28:18)
 - 3. Christ has a church. (Matthew 16:18)

4. Christ is the head of His church. (Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18)
5. Christ's words will judge all of humanity. (John 12:48)
6. Christians are to remain faithful to the teaching Christ delivered through His apostles. (Acts 2:42, John 16:13, Matthew 28:20)
- ii. So, the question is not an either-or situation.
 1. It is NOT "Christ OR the pattern?"
 2. It is "What does Christ want?"
- iii. The pattern is not an alternative to Christ. Christ is the source of the pattern.
- d. How can we respond to "The Hermeneutical Criticism" of the restoration principle?
 - i. Jesus used command, example, and necessary inference. (Matthew 19:1-12, Matthew 22:31-32)
 - ii. The existence of faulty inferences does not eliminate the necessity of interpreting Scripture and distinguishing what Scripture demands from what it simply authorizes.
 1. How do we know what is demanded and what is authorized?
 2. Even John Mark Hicks' "theological hermeneutic ultimately has to determine what Scripture teaches, permits, prohibits, and authorizes.
 3. Commands matter. Biblical examples can teach. Scriptural implications are valid. Not every biblical detail is necessarily demanded. It is impossible to abandon inference.
 - iii. The problem is NOT necessary inference; the problem is UNNECESSARY inference.
 1. A necessary inference is a conclusion that the biblical evidence requires us to draw.
 2. An unnecessary inference is a conclusion we draw beyond what the text warrants and then elevate to the status of divine law.
- e. How can we respond to "The Relational Criticism" of the restoration principle?
 - i. Jesus Himself taught that allegiance to truth would sometimes produce division, even within families.
 1. Matthew 10:34-36 – "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."
 2. Luke 12:51 – "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division..."
 - ii. Furthermore, division is not automatically evidence that truth has been mishandled.
 1. A divided church may be divided because someone has mishandled truth. But it may also be divided because people disagree about what the truth is, because someone refuses to accept the truth, or because competing convictions cannot be reconciled.
 - iii. True unity cannot exist independently of truth.
 1. Biblical unity is not unity detached from truth; it is unity grounded in truth.
 2. Consider John 1:17, John 3:21, John 8:31-32, John 14:6, John 17:17...
 3. Does truth matter to Jesus? Yes! Therefore, it should matter to us.
 - iv. The abuse of doctrinal boundaries does not eliminate the biblical necessity of doctrinal boundaries.

- f. So, what have we established? The modern criticisms raise legitimate questions about how restoration has sometimes been understood and practiced. They warn us against legalism, historical blindness, Christless ecclesiology, faulty hermeneutics, and divisive fellowship practices.
 - i. These warnings should not simply be dismissed.
 - ii. But we must also see that these criticisms do not disprove the biblical principle of restoration. Scripture still teaches obedience. Scripture still calls God's people to return when they depart. Scripture still gives us a revealed standard by which we can recognize error and correct it. Scripture still calls us to remain faithful to Christ and His teaching.
 - iii. The question, then, is not whether restoration is possible. The question is whether we are willing to apply the principle of restoration honestly enough to ourselves.

V. What hinders us from applying the restoration principle to ourselves today?

- a. If restoration is truly biblical, then restoration cannot merely be something we defend historically. It has to be something we practice personally. And if we believe restoration means returning to God's revealed will when we have departed from it, then we have to be willing to ask whether we ourselves have ever departed from it.
- b. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when tradition becomes authority.
 - i. Sometimes we reject the traditions of others while unconsciously treating our own traditions as unquestionable.
 - ii. Jesus warned against this in Mark 7:1-13.
 - iii. The question becomes: "Do we believe it because Scripture teaches it, or because this is how we have always done it? Or because we have always understood it this way?"
 - iv. Tradition may be right, but tradition cannot be our authority simply because it is tradition. Jesus did not condemn something simply because it was a tradition. He condemned human tradition when it displaced the commandment of God.
- c. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we confuse our applications to Scripture with Scripture itself.
 - i. There is a big difference between saying, "This is what the Bible teaches," and saying, "This is how I apply what the Bible teaches." Sometimes one may logically and rightfully lead to the other—but that is not always the case.
 - ii. Restoration demands humility because our applications may not be inspired. The Bible is inspired. Our applications of the Bible are not.
 - iii. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:21.
- d. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we are afraid of changing our minds.
 - i. Genuine restoration requires the willingness to be corrected or reproved.
 - ii. Acts 17:11 shows the Bereans putting even apostolic teaching to the test by examining the Scriptures.
 - iii. Acts 18:24-26 gives us a beautiful example: Apollos was an eloquent, knowledgeable, and sincere teacher, yet even he was willing to receive further instruction from Priscilla and Aquila, two ordinary tentmakers.
 - iv. Being willing to change our minds when Scripture corrects us is not weakness. It is a requirement of restoration.
- e. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we define faithfulness by uniformity.

- i. In many ways, this may be one of the biggest issues. Someone might say, “The church is united. Everybody is at peace. Everything is fine. We are one. This is who we are at the ____ church.” (Has the local church become more about a brand than about belonging to Jesus as Head?)
 - ii. Too often, we begin measuring faithfulness by whether or not everyone is “on board.” We measure faithfulness by whether everyone reaches the same conclusions, or, if they disagree, whether they are willing to “rock the boat.” And we do that instead of measuring faithfulness by whether everyone is submitting to Scripture. Uniformity and biblical unity are not necessarily the same thing.
 - iii. Romans 14:1-4, 10-13 demonstrates that not every disagreement is a fellowship-breaking issue. Yet Scripture also teaches that some matters are matters of truth, obedience, and fellowship.
 - iv. We must ask this one question: “Is restoration about restoring the biblical faith, or reproducing every conclusion that our particular tradition has reached?”
- f. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we lose Christ in our pursuit of the pattern.
 - i. The goal of restoration is not about reproducing first-century culture. The goal of Christianity is faithfulness to Jesus Christ. And because Jesus is the Head of His church, faithfulness to Jesus includes faithfulness to what He has revealed.
 - ii. Consider Colossians 1:18, Colossians 2:6-7, Hebrews 12:1-2.
 - iii. Obedience matters—but Christian obedience is not merely about checking boxes. It is the obedient response of people who belong to Jesus Christ.
- g. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we fail to apply Scripture to our present circumstances.
 - i. Restoration is not merely asking, “What did they do back then?”
 - ii. It also asks another question: “What does faithfulness to those principles require of us today?”
 - iii. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that Scripture equips us for every good work.
 - iv. Jude 3 teaches “the faith” was once for all delivered to the saints. Our task is not to invent a new faith for every generation, but to faithfully live out that faith in every generation.
 - v. The challenge is moving from restoring biblical principles, to applying biblical principles accurately, to living them faithfully in our own circumstances.
- h. We are hindered from practicing restoration correctly when we fail to allow truth to be tested.
 - i. It used to be said before sermons, “If you have a question about anything you see or hear today, or about anything you do not see or hear today, please ask. And if you see or hear something that is not in accordance with Scripture, you would be our friend if you would point that out to us.”
 - 1. While I don’t know the hearts or intentions of anybody other than myself, and while caution needs to be used before making any criticism, I do have to wonder whether we really meant it when we said things like that.
 - 2. Another observation is that I don’t hear statements like that as much today. Now, I admit that I may have just ignored them. But if they aren’t being made today, why not?
 - ii. The reality is that there can be places where questions are simply not welcome.

- iii. We need to remember that “truth has nothing to fear from an honest evaluation.” If we really believe that we are seeking God’s truth, then we should not be afraid to test our own beliefs, our own practices, our own traditions, and even our own conclusions. Restoration demands an honest evaluation.
- i. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to restoration is not that we don’t have access to the truth. It is that we may be unwilling to let the truth correct us. Tradition can become authority. Our applications can become indistinguishable from Scripture. Pride can make us afraid to change our minds. Uniformity can become more important than truth. The pattern can become more important than the Person who gave it. We can become so focused on what was done in the past that we fail to ask how faithfulness should be lived today. And we can become afraid to let our teaching and practice be honestly tested.
 - i. But if restoration is truly biblical, then we must be willing to restore ourselves.
 - ii. We cannot defend restoration as a principle while exempting ourselves from the principle. The restoration principle has to be applied to the Restorationists.
 - iii. The question is no longer whether restoration is possible. The question is whether we are willing to let restoration begin, or at least continue, with us.

VI. What are some areas where we may need to apply the restoration principle to ourselves?

- a. If restoration is truly biblical, then we cannot simply defend the principle—we must be willing to apply it to ourselves. So, without assuming that we have everything figured out, what are some areas where we may need to apply the restoration principle to ourselves?
 - i. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that I know everything, that I have all of the answers, or that I know every circumstance that may exist in every congregation or among every brother or sister. I certainly do not. I am also not suggesting that the areas I am about to mention are necessarily areas where we have departed from God’s will. I am simply offering them as possibilities—areas where we might honestly examine ourselves in light of Scripture.
 - ii. Let me add that none of this is intended to offend anyone or to criticize individuals, congregations, or traditions simply for the sake of criticism. If restoration means returning to God’s revealed will when we have departed from it, then we should be willing to ask these questions of ourselves with humility and honesty. I am asking these questions of myself as well. My purpose is not to tell us where we are wrong, but to encourage us to be willing to let Scripture show us where we may need to change.
- b. What are some areas where local churches may need to apply the restoration principle to themselves? Let me list a few possibilities for consideration...
 - i. We may need to reconsider our practice of the invitation—asking whether Scripture requires a public invitation at the conclusion of every assembly, or whether we have turned a particular method of calling people to respond to the gospel into a requirement for worship.
 - ii. We may need to reconsider how some practice the Lord’s Supper—asking whether Scripture intends it to be observed apart from the assembled church, and whether a separate serving for those who missed the assembly is consistent with the biblical purpose and pattern.

- iii. We may need to reconsider our understanding of the church treasury and benevolence—asking whether Scripture presents the treasury as merely an operational fund for maintaining the local church, or whether the church itself has a responsibility to care for needy brethren from its collective resources.
 - iv. We may need to restore a more biblical understanding of local church leadership—where elders shepherd and oversee rather than simply manage or vote in the “church board of directors meeting”, preachers teach and challenge rather than merely echo, and deacons serve confidently rather than simply carry out assignments.
 - v. We may need to restore our understanding of “forsaking the assembly”—distinguishing the biblical warning against abandoning the assembling of ourselves together from the attendance standards and conclusion we may have developed around that warning.
- c. What are some areas where individual Christians may need to apply the restoration principle to themselves? Let me list a few possibilities for consideration...
 - i. We may need to restore a greater emphasis on personal spiritual disciplines—such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, and personal devotion—that help us grow in our relationship with God.
 - ii. We may need to restore a more biblical understanding of modesty—where our clothing choices reflect godliness, self-control, respect, and a concern for how our choices affect ourselves and others.
 - iii. We may need to restore a more biblical understanding of entertainment and recreation—asking whether the things we watch, listen to, and participate in reflect the holiness, purity, self-control, and wisdom expected of Christians.
 - iv. We may need to restore a more biblical understanding of “secular Christian music”—asking whether or not we should support music that does not accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture, and whether we have given sufficient thought to the doctrinal messages we are putting into our hearts through music.
 - v. We may need to restore a more biblical attitude toward alcohol and social drinking—distinguishing between what God truly wants and the influence that we have on others.
- d. The point of these examples is not to suggest that we have necessarily gotten all of these things wrong. The point is to demonstrate what restoration requires of us. If we believe restoration means returning to God’s revealed will when we have departed from it, then we must be willing to examine every area of our faith and practice—even those areas we have defended for generations.
 - i. Some of the things we have discussed may be matters of clear biblical teaching. Others may involve questions of application, inference, expediency, or tradition. And that is precisely why we need to be willing to examine them honestly. We must distinguish between what God has said and what we have concluded from what God has said.
 - ii. Restoration requires more than the courage to tell someone else that they need to change. It requires the humility to ask whether we need to change.
 - iii. If we are unwilling to examine ourselves, then we are not really practicing restoration—we are simply defending our own conclusions.
 - iv. And perhaps that is where restoration must always begin: not with the people “out there,” not with another congregation, not with another brother, not with another generation—but with ourselves.
 - v. The restoration principle has to be applied to the Restorationists.

Conclusion:

- So, is restoration possible? I believe the answer is yes.
 - Not because Restorationists have always gotten everything right.
 - Not because every conclusion reached by those who have called themselves restorationists have been correct.
 - Not because our traditions, practices, or interpretations are beyond examination.
 - Restoration is possible because God has revealed His will, preserved His word, called His people to faithfulness, and repeatedly called those who have departed from Him to return.
- We have seen that restoration is a biblical concept. We have seen that it is possible to depart from God's will—and that it is possible to return. We have considered the criticisms of restorationism, and some of those criticisms should cause us to examine our own history, our own methods, our own traditions, and our own conclusions.
 - But those criticisms do not eliminate the biblical principle of restoration.
 - In fact, they may remind us of something very important: the restoration principle must be applied to the Restorationists.
 - We cannot simply ask, "What does everyone else need to restore?" We must be willing to ask, "What do I need to restore?"
- If we have departed from God's will, may we have the humility to recognize it, the courage to change it, and the faith to return to what God has revealed.
 - Perhaps restoration is not simply about going back.
 - Perhaps it is about coming home—to God, to His Word, and to the will He has revealed for His people.
- So, is restoration possible?
 - Yes.
 - And by the grace of God, may we always be willing to let it begin with us.