

Restoration Revisited (4): Our Gang

I. Introduction

A. One of the preacher's I follow on Twitter tweeted this warning last week—

If you live around the preacher, you have the right to remain silent... anything you say or do may be used as a sermon illustration.

1. Ask my kids! Ask Art! Last week it was comment on clowns in church
 - a. Afterward, someone then told me about attending a 12-step group
 - b. In few weeks, they became closer there than to people at church
2. Why is that? The 12-steps of AA are actually based on Christian ideas
 - a. Are we powerless over sin? Do we believe only God can save us?
 - b. Those are the first two of the 12-steps; many others are familiar too
3. So why can AA-model seem more effective? It creates **COMMUNITY**
 - a. People in AA are there to fight the same demon... and know it
 - 1) There's no posturing, no pretending, no "*I'm soberer than thou*"
 - 2) Nobody is "*just fine.*" They're there because they're really not fine
 - b. But they're not there just for themselves but to help others as well
 - c. That kind of "community" is far different from that in many churches

B. We continue this morning with a look at "*Restoration Revisited*"

1. Last week we looked at the difference between FORM and FUNCTION
 - a. We can't do "*Bible things in Bible ways.*" We must do Bible things
 - b. We don't need to stress NT forms-n-format but its passion-n-power
2. Part of that passion and power was found in a community (**Acts 2:42**)
 - a. "*Devoted*" means "*to persist or hold fast*" ("*keep on keeping on*")
 - b. Kept on keeping on in **κοινωνία** ("*fellowship, sharing, participation*")
 - 1) To many, "*fellowship*" basically means "*green bean casserole*"
 - 2) In the NT, **κοινωνία** was a sharing of lives together, community
 - c. Like AA, it's people with common commitment & common purpose
 - 1) I'm not suggesting that the needs to start more support groups
 - 2) I'm saying that God created the church to be a support group
3. If we're to restore the fellowship of the NT church, must stress

II. Restoring Fellowship: LOVE

- A. We often read texts about “*Last Supper*” before we eat communion
1. I never remember anyone reading from **John 13** before communion
 - a. John 13 is where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, right? Right
 - 1) The context is the same upper room as eating of Lord’s Supper
 - 2) John chooses not to tell of bread and wine, but a basin and towel
 - b. Jesus washed their feet as object lesson (**Reading: John 13:13-17**)
 - c. Point isn’t that we somehow replicate this form (*foot-washing*)
 - d. To be NT church, we must have same FUNCTION (*we serve others*)
 2. Remember the context of Jesus washing disciples’ feet is Last Supper
 - a. John reminds us the cross isn’t just about how much God loves us
 - b. The cross is about you and me loving and serving one another
- B. In a context of both the cross and washing feet, Jesus says two things
1. **First**, Jesus gives his followers a NEW COMMAND (**John 13:34**)
 - a. Jesus had said that “love your neighbor” was second great command
 - 1) And that command was quote from **Lev 19:18** (*that’s in the OT*)
 - 2) That’s same chapter we saw that talked about beards and tattoos
 - 3) Trivia: This is the first time the Bible gives command to love
 - b. How can that be a new command if it is such an old command?
 - c. What might you think I mean if I said, “*I just bought a new car?*”
 - 1) You might think I mean that you are paying me way too much
 - 2) I might mean I got a brand-new fresh from showroom 2019 car
 - 3) More likely, it’d be a new-to-me 2010 Ford off CraigsList
 - 4) Even more likely, Lynn got a new car and my new car is old one
 - a) What if it used air for fuel? Inside bigger than outside? And flies?
 - b) That would be a new car in the sense, “*Never been one like that*”
 - d. That’s Jesus’ new command, “*Love other as I have loved you*”
 - 1) Remember the earlier object lesson, “*As I’ve washed your feet...*”
 - 2) He will define His love at the cross and tells us, “*Love like that*”
 - e. How can we know that this is what John means? (**1 John 3:16-18**)

2. **Second**, Jesus also gives us a new MARK OF DISCIPLESHIP (**John 13:34**)
 - a. All preachers have a sermon somewhere “*Marks of True Church*”
 - 1) The right church has right baptism, communion, name and music
 - 2) Dan and Byrdie Hawley came here from the “*No Class Church*”
 - a) That’s how they introduced themselves, “*You’ll fit in well at Denbigh*”
 - b) Byrdie showed me a sermon; a mark of the true church is no classes
 - b. Jesus is crystal clear about how others will know we’re his disciples
 - 1) It not about forms, formats and formulas; it’s all about love
 - 2) Some think it’s OK to be unloving to seek after right form/format
 - 3) Preacher friend came home to find locks on parsonage changed
 - a) Elders fired him (*and didn’t tell him*) because they disagreed with him
 - b) They were defending right by denying the thing Jesus said was right
 - c. Here’s the text the altos sang earlier in service (**1 John 4:7-8**)
 - 1) Notice how he ends; God lives/abides if we love (**1 John 4:12**)
 - 2) This call to live and love in community is at the heart of God
 - 3) We cannot be the church in the NT without this mark of love

III. Restoring Fellowship: Unity

- A. If we’re to restore NT church, we need to get together (**Acts 2:44; 4:32**)
 1. They’re “*all together*,” in the same place and in the same purpose
 - a. **Question:** Do we turn LOVE something less than just plain LIKE?
 “*I love them and all that, but I don’t like ‘em much or want to be around ‘em*”
 - 1) You’d never wish them harm or do anything that was hurtful
 - 2) If they were on fire, you would throw water on them... probably
 - 3) But you don’t like them and try to avoid them if possible
 - b. Doesn’t that make love more abstract and less helpful than like?
 - 1) The love Jesus commands not abstract at all (**Luke 6:27, 35**)
 - 2) Paul adds if our enemy is hungry or thirsty, what? (**Rom 12:20**)
 2. If we’re to treat enemies like we like them—what about church?
 - a. Fellowship means “common-unity; we go all in on being altogether
 - b. That won’t come easily or naturally; why it is “*unity of the Spirit*”
 - c. We have no claim on being a NT church unless we live in unity

B. Did you know we play a part in one of Jesus' unanswered prayers?

1. We know of one unanswered prayer in Gethsemane, "*Let this cup pass*"
 - a. There was another unanswered prayer that night (**John 17:20-23**)
 - b. Jesus faced betrayal in hours maybe minutes; what did he pray for?
 - c. Sure, he prayed for a way of escape; he also prayed for our unity
2. Look closely at this part of the prayer, and you see a theological reason
 - a. God was in Christ (vice-versa) and disciples were in both
 - b. Because God and Christ are one, the disciples must be one as well
3. Also a practical reason; if's we not one, the world won't believe
 - a. Twice here Jesus says our unity will be a message to the world
 - b. The world, as in "*God so loved.*" That was about to happen.
 - c. The world would take that cross seriously because of our unity
4. Will Jesus' final prayer be answered? In a sense, it's up to us!

IV. Conclusion

A. We live in a time that seems as divided as it has ever been before

1. We are as divided politically as we have ever been in my lifetime
 - a. Politics was "*art of the possible.*" Compromise. Scratch my back
 - b. Now it's about winning. Screaming sound-bites. Twitter Turmoil.
 - c. It's about choosing sides; compromise is just another way of losing
2. We are as divided racially, in some ways as divided as we've ever been
 - a. It is a time when Black Lives Matter collides with White Privilege
 - b. We don't try to understand others or walk in other people's shoes
 - c. They are too racist, too liberal, too bigoted, too socialist, too wrong
3. The way you treat those who disagree is to shout louder over them

B. Suppose there was something in our world that embodies the love of God

1. Suppose there was a place of peace and of acceptance for all people
 - a. Here people, backgrounds, and opinions were often different
 - b. But differences were as important as was love, acceptance, peace
2. Might people want to be part of that kind of a place? Boy, I do!
3. Jesus says that this love and unity is really the mark of his church