Restoring the New Testament Church: Part Three



In Search of the Golden Goblet

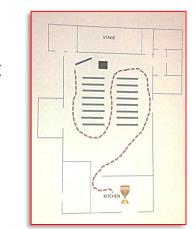
Four volunteers please ...

Come to the whiteboard when instructed and select your map.

Follow the red trail marked on your map. You must follow the trail on your map or you will be disqualified.

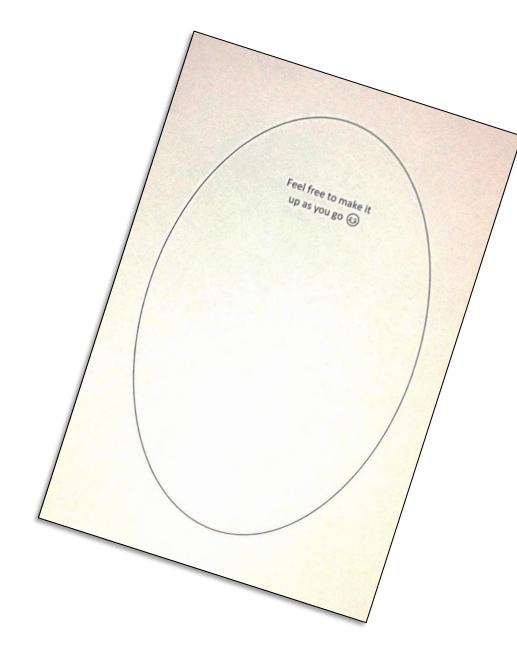
Find the golden goblet and then retrace your steps to return it to the whiteboard and collect your reward.

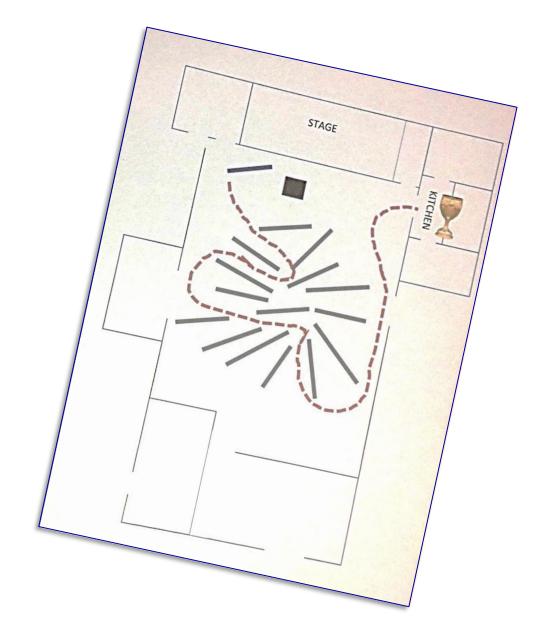
Actual layout



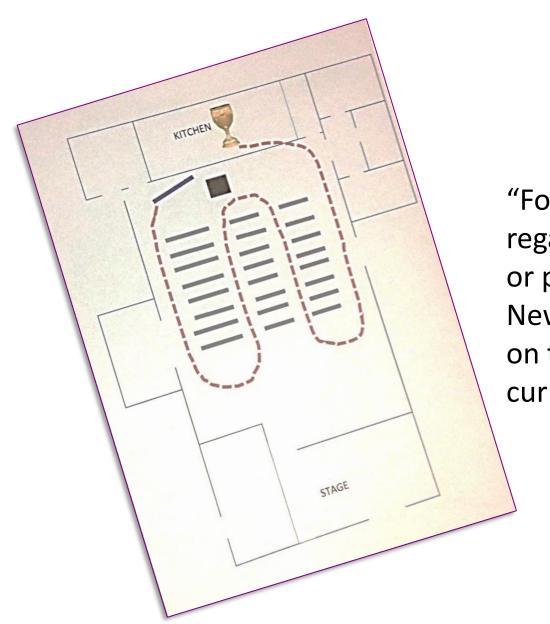
Quotes from the lesson last week creating different maps:

"The second answer is that the variety of differing interpretations of the biblical texts now on offer should lead us to realize that the meaning of the text is created as a particular group of people reads the text in the light of its own particular traditions and beliefs and in its own particular context. That is to say, the 'meaning' of a text is relative to the people who interpret it."





"We may agree or disagree with Paul, but we must do him the justice of letting him hold and teach his own beliefs, and not distort his beliefs into conformity with what we should prefer him to have said. (This applies to many other subjects than Paul's baptismal doctrine!)"



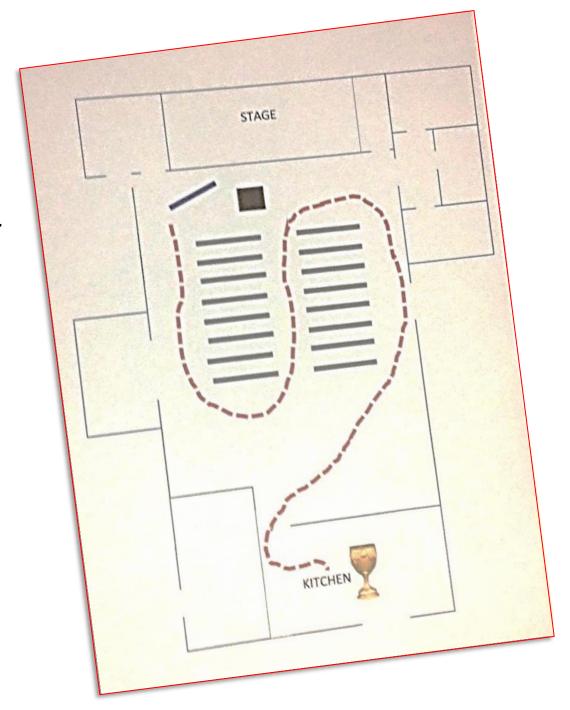
"For Wesleyans, there is no point trying to regain the forms of worship, organisation, or practices found in a supposed 'pure' New Testament church; the focus must be on the same presence of the Spirit in our current developing forms."

The accurate plan, true to the design of the architect and builders

"So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15)

"I hope to come to you soon, but *I am writing these* instructions to you so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

"Hold to the standard [tupos, pattern or model] of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus ... and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2)



The importance of patterns / plans / models / maps ...

An accurate plan keeps us on the right path to advance towards our desired destination. An inaccurate map leads only to confusion and risks missing the destination all together.

A shared map enables us to remain harmonious and unified in our common journey together towards our desired destination. Different plans foster confusion and contention among fellow travellers, causing companions to go separate ways.

The Concept of Restoring the New Testament Church

The inherent weakness of every historical restoration movement (and there have been plenty of them) lies in restoration's strength: the commitment to being biblical in teaching and practice can make us vulnerable to pride and legalism.

Trying to be Christians only is not the same as saying we are the only Christians.

That sort of judgement is God's prerogative alone ... What and how much error will God's grace tolerate? Think of apostate Israel; think of the church in Corinth, or Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) ... think of ourselves! Ever change your mind about any Christian teaching or practice? Do we really think we're perfect? Infallible? Thankfully, we are saved by grace through faith: trusting and obeying Christ while humbly seeking to follow him, albeit imperfectly – rather than by our own performance: trusting in ourselves and our own law keeping score-card which is legalism (see Galatians 2:20-3:29 ... and remember the parable of the wheat and the tares, Matthew 13).

Each one of us, however, is accountable to God for what we do or don't approve (see Romans 14); which impacts upon who and what we have fellowship with!

The Concept of Restoring the New Testament Church

God's grace is not license to do as we please!

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:11-14 NKJV).

So neither should we stop challenging and encouraging all believers (including ourselves) to follow God's will in all respects by constantly reviewing and adjusting our teaching and practice in conformity with the church established by Christ's apostles in the first century AD (the standard) ... which is the church we can all read about in the New Testament Scriptures ... because sin in all of its diverse and often subtle forms (both inside and outside the church) inevitably tries to draw us away from God!

The Concept of Restoring the New Testament Church

Our non-denominational, restorationist stance, puts us in the privileged position of considering and benefitting from all the insights and traditions developed among believers throughout church history – as we weigh them in the light of Scripture, sorting the wheat from the chaff – without being obliged to, or bound by, any particular denominational allegiance or dogma.

Restoring what exactly? The New Testament church's teaching and practice – in form and in spirit

Selectivity: Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches (restoring charismatic gifts of glossolalia and prophecy); Presbyterian Church government by elders (*presbuteros*); Baptist Church (believer's immersion); Campbell-Stone Movement: Churches of Christ/Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ (perhaps the most comprehensive effort – motivated less by any one issue than by the desire for unity among all true believers – a "back to basics/common ground" basis for unity)



Restoring and maintaining New Testament Christianity requires a focus upon both form and spirit; especially spirit (love ... because God is love)

The 19th Century Stone-Campbell Movement

Extraordinary growth in the U.S. (and U.K., Australia), but in time the focus tended to favour form over spirit (signalling a shift towards legalism and heightening the tension between the two goals of unity and restoration).

"Marks of the True Church" ... Work (worship, evangelism, benevolence)

Worship (corporate forms ... "5 acts of worship")

Organisation (congregationalism; elders, deacons, evangelists)

Reproducing the enduring biblical "forms" is relatively easy to do and the outcome is concrete ... easily measured ... "are we there yet?"

Reproducing the biblical "spirit" is harder to achieve (e.g. fruit of the spirit, Galatians 5; the mind of Christ, Philippians 2) because it is the result of cooperating with God's Spirit over a lifetime (sanctification). It is a less tangible process that calls for grace and compassion and love and mutual submission and sacrifice and forgiveness and patience and faith and hope and humility and respect ... and it is hard to "measure" the progress of a dance (as individuals and as a faith community) as it flows forwards, and sometimes backwards, and then sideways ... hopefully with more forward steps than backward steps!

In essentials, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love

Unity Diversity

Restoring and maintaining New Testament Christianity requires a focus upon both unity and diversity (because God is *One in Three*)

Jesus' prayer for unity among his disciples (John 17:20-21)

"I ask not only on behalf of these [Christ's apostles], but also on behalf of **those who will believe in me through their word**, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me"

Unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3)

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...

Paul's call for unity in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus

Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in **the same mind and the same purpose**. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Restoration as a basis for Christian Unity

Paul admonishes us to humbly, patiently and lovingly maintain the unity of the Spirit represented as Seven Ones (Ephesians 4:1-6). There is ...

One Body (ecclesiology & soteriology)

One Spirit, One Lord, One God (Father, Son & Holy Spirit – the triune One in Three – the ultimate Unity in Diversity)

One Hope (eschatology)

One Faith (believing that Jesus is Messiah? ... or the one apostolic tradition – the faith entrusted to the saints in the first century AD *once for all*, the one faith for which we are to contend?)

One Baptism (the one initiation *into Christ* for all, Galatians 3:26-29; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

We may struggle to agree on every detail about the one church, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, and the one God and Father of all ... but unity does not depend upon or demand 100% agreement and conformity (Romans 14). There is absolutely no chance of attaining and maintaining unity among believers unless we accept THERE IS JUST ONE OF EACH OF "THE SEVEN" IN THE SPIRIT'S RECIPE FOR UNITY ... we may not agree on every detail of every line in God's script, but we must at least be on the same page of the same act in the same play!

Restoration recognises we cannot have biblical unity without accepting these singularities with humility and love ... and letting God through Scripture define for believers what the one church, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, and the one God and Father of all actually are. What did Christ's apostles teach? What did Christ's apostles practice? They were the ones to whom and through whom the Spirit revealed all truth ... and they have passed that truth – all of it – on to us! This is to have the "same mind and purpose" that Paul demanded of the sectarian Corinthians ... "agreeing to disagree" on these seven fundamentals, or saying "it doesn't matter as long as you're sincere" won't do because such attitudes foster, justify and sustain the very divisions that are contrary to God's will.

Diversity

Paul also admonishes us to humbly, patiently and lovingly respect one another's consciences regarding "disputable matters" (Romans 14:1-15:7)

Some things are non-negotiable; some things are not so clear-cut or as important

There are some things Scripture links to salvation, for example:

Incarnation (Jude 4; 1 & 2 John)

Godly standard of morality (Jude 4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6-9; salvation by law-keeping as opposed to salvation by grace through faith in Christ)

Faith, repentance, baptism (Acts 2:36-41; 11:15-18; 1 Peter 3:21)

Those things explicitly taught in the New Testament that are explicitly associated with unity, salvation or are commanded

Things reasoned from the New Testament that are not explicitly associated with salvation "disputable matters"

Diversity

Things not directly addressed in the New Testament but justified as expedients or cultural adaptations to express and fulfil God's will

Care factor: High

Flexibility range: Low

LOVE

Care factor: Low

Flexibility range: High



A basic foundation and framework; or a detailed blueprint?



