

The Restored Gospel

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The notion of an apostasy and restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is rejected by most of the Christian community, with many taking great offense at the charge of such a possibility. The world apostasy means “a total desertion of or departure from one’s religion, principles, or party.” Was there an apostasy in Christianity, and if so has there been a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Scriptural and Historical Evidences of the Apostasy

From a scriptural standpoint there are a number of Biblical references to a future apostasy including Amos 8:11, 1 Tim. 4:1-2, Heb. 13:20, Isa. 24:2-5, Jer. 2:13, 2 Thes. 2:3-4 and several others. These references, as compelling as they are, must be put into proper historical and spiritual perspective, especially since the New Testament was not formally canonized until 1546 at the Council of Trent (by vote: 24 yea, 15 nay, 16 abstain—Metzger, Bruce M., March 13, 1997. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance.* Oxford University Press, p. 24).

There are historical events that would suggest an apostasy including political and spiritual difficulties in the early church including the Crusades of the late 1000’s, the great Schism of 1054, the Medieval Inquisition of 1184, the Spanish Inquisition of 1478, the Roman Inquisition of 1542, and the silencing of Galileo in the 1600’s.

There are figures in history that have left no scarcity of writings to suggest the apostasy of the early church including Eusebius (~275 – May 30, 339), who was Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, Martin Luther (November 10, 1483 – February 18, 1546), and John Wesley (June 17, 1703 – March 2, 1791) to name a few. According to these notable figures in history, there was indeed an apostasy of the early Christian church as demonstrated through various historical events.

Modern Evidences of an Apostasy

One might consider the Christian environment of the modern era to decide if the current status of Christendom has been affected by an apostasy. Has spiritual corruption of churches and Christian leadership led to the falling away of individuals, or even entire sects of Christianity?

Matthew 16:18 Misunderstood

While it may be possible to come to the conclusion of an apostasy based upon examination, study, and prayer, there still must be a reconciliation of the scripture from Matthew 16:18 which states: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” One must carefully study this scripture before jumping to literal conclusions. It’s clear that the gates of hell did not prevail against Christianity itself, but that it was highly probable (even factual) that the vain ambitions of man, inspired by Satan, caused critical church doctrines to be distorted and changed, splintering Christianity into many different pieces. What was left were portions of truth scattered among different Christian sects, the absence of the authority of the priesthood (by way of lineage and worthiness), and no single church that had the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A key issue that one must come to understand is the misinterpretation of what “the rock” means in the scripture from Matthew 16:18. The Lord says that upon this rock I will build my church. What is the rock the Lord is referring to? The name Peter in Greek is petros (a small rock), and the word for rock is petra (meaning a bedrock of sorts). The Greek text from Matthew 16:18 is to be read as the following: “Thou art Peter [petros, or small rock], and upon this rock [petra, or bedrock] I will build my church” (see James A. Carver, “I Have a Question,”

Ensign, Jan. 1986, 54–56). The conclusion from this brief examination is that the rock the Lord was referring to was revelation, that the church is build upon Christ, the “rock” of revelation. It was upon the principle of continuous revelation from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that the church of Jesus Christ would be built, and that the gates of hell would never prevail against the revelation of the Lord. See the website section and Sword Series™ essay on Revelation for more details.

Considering for a moment the likelihood of an apostasy, let us contemplate the chain of events that led up to the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth in all its fullness.

Christian Churches Abound in Early America

Fast forward from the writings of the New Testament to the early 1700’s and the formation of the America’s where freedoms led to a wide open religious field. This freedom led to the creation and growth of numerous congregations of Christian churches. These various sects of Christianity often shared a great deal of common doctrine, while many evolved into their own doctrines that were different from other congregations. Combine this with the fact that many clergy and ecclesiastical leaders made their living through the donations of their congregations, and the result was a fiercely competitive landscape between different Christian churches. These churches literally battled for members, often by tearing down one another through preaching and other forms of disputations.

This practice of competition among Christian sects continued for centuries across the globe and was accelerated with the establishment of the United States of America, where freedom of religion was guaranteed by the constitution. The opportunity to freely worship according to one’s own faith was a strong allure for millions as they migrated to America.

Following the First Great Awakening among American colonial Protestants in the 1730s to 1740s was the Second Great Awakening between 1820 and 1835. The First Great Awakening made religion deeply personal to the average individual, while the Second Great Awakening coined the term “born again” and ushered in a period of feeling God without having to worry about doctrine. During this period

there was a sharp increase in membership among the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians in America, who often evangelized through tent revivals and religious tours. It was during this period of religious fervor, among the freedom and liberty of the United States of America, where the Lord would restore his church on the earth again as promised in the scriptures.

Scriptural Prophecies of the Restoration

Just as the apostasy was prophesied in the Bible, so too was the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Consider the teachings of Peter the apostle as he spoke to those in the temple: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21). The prophecy of the restoration was foretold even before the apostles were taken from the earth, which restoration would come before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul reinforces the restoration theme as he spoke to the Ephesians as recorded in Ephesians 1:10: “That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.” Paul exclaims that in the dispensation of the fullness of times (which is the present dispensation), that although there may be many different sects and doctrinal beliefs, they will all be gathered (or restored) into one great whole.

The book of Revelation describes the restoration of the gospel in the latter days in chapter 14, verse 6 which reads: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” If the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ was already on the earth there would be no need for an angel to bring the everlasting gospel to the earth.

How the Restoration Would Come About

Considering the incomprehensible love our Father in Heaven has for us as his children, we can surely conclude that such a Father would not let his children live in darkness and would restore all truth before the second coming of his son Jesus Christ.

The question would be how? How would the Lord restore His church, given the massive splintering of Christianity, given the “every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14) that existed; given that religious leaders across the globe were already predisposed to their own thoughts and inclinations? Such a restoration would surely cause uproar and lead to even more contention among churches.

The answer may be found in a parable from Jesus, as recorded in Mark 2:21-22 which reads: “No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.”

The restoration would not come from rebuilding an existing Christian sect. According to the parable, to restore an existing sect would cause that sect to fail and the restoration itself to fail. The restoration could only take place in the formation of an entirely new Christian church, or a “new bottle” as the Lord says. Furthermore, the individual who would facilitate such a restoration could not come from an existing sect, nor could they have a predisposition to any doctrines or affiliations or the same would hold true. The restoration would have to be facilitated by an entirely “new bottle.”

The Lord would raise up an individual who would be that new bottle, and begin the restoration in a land that would allow the formation of his restored holy church amongst a free and liberated people. Millions of Christians throughout the world have come to believe that the individual chosen by God to facilitate the restoration was the prophet Joseph Smith, and that the land the restoration would take place in was America.

Joseph Smith and the Restoration

Joseph Smith was born in December of 1805 in Sharon Vermont, and with his family would later move to western New York just outside of Palmyra. Joseph was one of nine children born to Joseph Smith Senior and his wife Lucy. Joseph was raised on a farm, and like many others during that period of time worked hard with the family to sustain life. Joseph was said to be a curious individual who had a deep spiritual inclination from early on and a spirit to question that which he felt was necessary to do so.

After an eventful childhood, which included a serious medical condition with one of his legs, Joseph found himself in the middle of the religious revival of 1820 as a fourteen year old boy. In Joseph’s own words he describes the period of time: “There was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all sects in that region of the country. Indeed, the whole district of the country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, ‘Lo, here!’ and others, ‘Lo, there!’ Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist” (Joseph Smith History 1:5).

Choosing a Church to Join

While much of Joseph’s family aligned themselves to the Presbyterian faith, Joseph was unsure which church taught the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Joseph found himself vexed by the contention between the various churches as he offered the following observation: “The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and the Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others” (Joseph Smith History 1:9).

The contention among the various Christian sects led Joseph to believe that something was amiss. Perhaps Joseph knew in his heart that same spirit which Paul attempted to communicate to the Ephesians: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one

hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). If there was one faith and one baptism, how could there be so many churches? Which one was the true church of Jesus Christ?

Seeking Divine Guidance

Having a deep desire to find and join the true church of Jesus Christ, Joseph recorded an experience of reading the Bible that proved to be a turning point for the young man: “While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man that this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart” (Joseph Smith History 1:11).

This experience fueled Joseph’s desire to know the truth and seek the guidance of the Lord in finding the answer to his question of which church to join. In the spring of 1820 Joseph decided to put his faith, and the promise of the Lord, to the test when he went into a grove of trees near his home to offer the most earnest prayer of his heart.

Satan Tries to Thwart the Lord’s Plan

Shortly after Joseph began his prayer the unexpected happened. Joseph records the experience of that day: “After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction” (Joseph Smith History 1:15).

Embarking on the event that would usher in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world, Satan tried desperately to intervene and prevent the young boy Joseph from receiving divine revelation.

Joseph is Delivered and the Restoration Commences

Joseph reached deep into his well of faith and pleaded with his Father in Heaven, in the name of Jesus Christ, for deliverance from the evil intercession. Joseph then remarks on the miracle that happened moments later: “...just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other – This is My beloved Son. Hear Him” (Joseph Smith History 1:16).

In what is commonly referred to as the “First Vision”, this divine visitation from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ began a series of events that would lead to the complete restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. Joseph’s prayer was answered and he was instructed to not join any of the existing churches, as none of the churches taught the *fullness* of the gospel. The Lord was quoted as saying to Joseph: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (Joseph Smith History 1:19). In an event reminiscent of the transfiguration before Peter, James, and John; where Moses and Elias appeared with the Savior and the voice of God was heard out of the cloud—Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to the boy Joseph in answer to his heartfelt prayer.

The new bottle was chosen in Joseph Smith, who would be tasked with restoring the Lord’s church on the earth again. A 14 year old boy, with no predisposition to any doctrines, who was willing to humble himself before the Lord to obtain guidance and direction according to His will, not the will of himself.

The Restoration of All Things

Following the first vision Joseph Smith was given instructions and preparation through the Angel Moroni, a messenger sent from the Lord. This was not unusual, as one must consider that the Angel Gabriel was sent to the

Virgin Mary as a messenger from the Lord about the coming of Christ. The Angel Moroni instructed Joseph sparsely over a period of approximately seven years. During this period of preparation Joseph Smith was often admonished by the Lord for his decisions and therefore refined in his thoughts and actions in alignment with the Lord's expectations for him.

The admonishment Joseph received from the Lord, and the adversity of those around him, prepared the soon to be prophet to lead the world into the dispensation of the fullness of times, a time of preparation for the second coming of Jesus Christ that would include the restoration of all things and the re-establishment of the Lord's church on earth. Several sections of the website and Sword Series™ essays include embedded explanations on the restoration including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, the organization of the church, and many other "plain and precious truths" that were lost or distorted as a result of the apostasy.

Conclusion

This section can't begin to do justice in explaining the principle of the apostasy, the miracle of the first vision, and the magnitude of the restoration. There are entire texts dedicated to exploring these subjects that will provide the reader with rich scriptural and historical support, along with spiritual and scholarly explanations that will fill in the gaps left by this brief composition.

The scriptures and events of history have unfolded the unfortunate reality of the apostasy, while likewise providing an equally compelling illumination of the restoration. Although the organized religions of the Christian world may have understandably drifted away from the fullness of the gospel over the centuries that followed the ascension of Christ, our Heavenly Father in His infinite love for us restored the fullness of the gospel prior to the second coming of his only begotten son.

The Apostle John wrote "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written, Amen" (John 21:25). If the world itself cannot contain all the books that "should be written," of what Jesus did, or even

said; one must wonder if there are important parts of the gospel of Jesus Christ that might be missing from what is being taught in Christianity today—or even contained in the Bible itself. We must assume there is truth among all of the 38,000 Christian denominations in the world today, and therefore they are equipped to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ unto salvation in Him.

The real question we must ask ourselves is: "Is there a Christian Church on the earth today that has *all*, or even *most*, of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ?" If the answer is yes, then all truth seeking Christians should strive to find that church. If the answer is no, then any Christian Church will be sufficient for the children of God to learn faith in Jesus Christ and find salvation in Him.

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