

## What's So Great about the Restoration Movement?

by Dr. Lloyd Knowles, professor of History  
Great Lakes Christian College

(excerpts from "Restoration Appreciation Week 2016 Pamphlet #1)

### AMERICAN AND BIBLICAL ORIGINS

Shortly after the American Revolution, Americans were looking for things to bring them together in political unity and religious syncretism (the blending of different belief system). In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the various Christian denominations that were planted in the colonies – often called “sects” in those days – were exclusive in their doctrines and contentious with each other. Many argued that they were “the true church,” uniquely ordained by God. I’ve seen this in my lifetime, too. In the 1950s and 1960s, different groups were saying, “We’re right and you’re wrong,” with some of them boldly crowing, “Therefore you’re going to hell and we’ll be the only ones in heaven.”

That’s what “The Restoration Movement” is about. It began because many people were asking, “Can’t we all agree on something? Something central? Something around which we can have a basic unity?” So in 1800 a concordat was agreed upon by the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists to call a truce in their bickering over various interpretations of doctrinal issues and to join together in evangelizing the “frontier” (over the Appalachian Mountains, especially in Kentucky and Tennessee). Preachers from different denominations simply focused on presenting the message of the gospel itself. They stood on wagons and even tree stumps shouting the good news to all who gathered around to listen. Thus began what has been termed “The Second Great Awakening” or “The Great Revival” in America. [See John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginning of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1972).]

Now the question I’m supposed to deal with is, “What so great about the Restoration Movement?” The Restoration Movement emerged from numerous different churches. Many of the great leaders were Presbyterians.

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Now the question I’m supposed to deal with is, “What so great about the Restoration Movement?” The Restoration Movement emerged from numerous different churches. Many of the great leaders were Presbyterians.

Some were Baptists. Others – including one major leader – were Methodist. Becoming frustrated with their pursuit of the true church “authorized” by God and disenchanted with the plethora of denominations claiming exclusively to be that church, they sought to find a “pattern” for the church that would satisfy their spiritual hunger. The result was expressed in two basic pleas (or goals), which they came to emphasize. The first was unity, and the second was restoration of the New Testament template for the ideal church in its principles and practices. The former would be accomplished through adherence to the later.

#### FOUR SLOGANS

I’m approached quite often by people who ask me what the Church of Christ/Christian Church “believes” or what the Restoration Movement is all about. With typical limited time that I have to respond, I usually list and explain our four guiding principles:

1. “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love.”
2. “Where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent.”
3. “We have no creed by Christ, and no book but the Bible.”
4. “We are not the only Christians; we are Christians only.”

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and in all things, love.”*



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