

The Church and Restoration Branches

“Using the things of this world in the manner designed of God”

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In revelation given to the Church on April 18, 1909 in Lamoni, Iowa the Prophet Joseph Smith III brought the above words to the Church. Apostle Arthur Oakman would years later refer to those words as true and as inspired as any revelation ever given.

I wish to discuss in this paper those words as they relate to Restoration Branches. *Doctrine and Covenants* says this in Section 128:8c, “...*living and acting honestly and honorably before God and in the sight of all men, using the things of this world in the manner designed of God, that the places where they occupy may shine as Zion, the redeemed of the Lord.*”

Restoration Branches, as we know them today, have mostly been formed since 1984. In that year an ordinance of the RLDS Church was changed in its practice and understanding. This change of an ordinance created a division within the church that ran very deep and many suffered the loss of family and friends.

The question we have before us is how are Restoration Branches supposed to function in obedience to God under the condition the Church finds itself in?

A commonly used word amongst Restoration Branches is to add the word independent. What one is saying is that they belong to an Independent Restoration Branch. The usage of this word after 1984 was meant primarily to mean being independent of the RLDS (now known as the Community of Christ) leadership and organization. As time moved on the word also meant separation from other Restoration Branches who practiced or thought differently even though there was partial agreement in terms of beliefs and church government.

Let’s begin by looking at *Doctrine and Covenants* 125:14. It states, “*Branches and districts are to be conducted according to the rules given in the law as directed in a former revelation: They shall take the things which have been given unto them as my law to the church to be my law to govern my church. And these affairs are not to be conducted by manifestations of the Spirit unless these directions and manifestations come through the regularly authorized officers of branch or district. If my people will respect the officers whom I have called and set in the church, I will respect these officers; and if they do not, they cannot expect the riches of gifts and blessings of direction.*”

The ordinances of the Church are considered sacred. When the change in practice and understanding came about those who did not agree with those changes lost confidence in the leadership of the church. The result was division and in many cases separation. The outcome confirmed what was stated in Section 125, and so the blessings of direction were greatly impacted. Restoration Branches and people were left with a situation that has proved to be

very difficult. In the absence of a Prophet how do we receive guidance from above and remain one as a people? The answer to this question has proven to be a great challenge.

To help us let's look at *The Book of Mormon*. We find an account in Mosiah 11 that gives us some detail as to how the Church functioned in *The Book of Mormon*.

Mosiah 11:97-104 states, *"And it came to pass that King Mosiah granted unto Alma, that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church.*

Now this was done because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher; neither could they all hear the word of God in one assembly; therefore they did assemble themselves together in different bodies, being called churches;

*Every church having priests and their teachers, and every priest **preaching the word according as it was delivered him by the mouth of Alma;***

And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches they were all one church; yea, even the church of God;

For there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God.

And now there were seven churches in the land of Zarahemla.

*And it came to pass that whosoever were desirous to take upon them the name of Christ, or of God, they did join the churches of God; and **they were called the people of God,***

*And **the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed,** and prospered in the land."*

In this scripture we learn that the word churches would be like our use of the word branches. The Lord did not set up different denominations or organizational structures. We know this because these passages describe *"they were all one church"*, and they were all under the direction of Alma.

In the New Testament we see another reference to seven churches. This can be found in chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelations. This revelation is given by the Apostle John who, along with the other disciples, traveled in ministry with Jesus. John is writing to seven churches. He repeats to them the phrase, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

John is in exile and he is writing to these seven churches which is also like our use of the word branches. John's statements are short, and he shares with them what the Spirit has shown to him about each one. Some of what he says is encouragement. Some is warning. John will tell them of good things that they are doing, and also the bad things that have crept in amongst them. He likens these churches unto candlesticks (Revelations 1:20). The purpose of a

candlestick is to hold up the source of light – the candle. The purpose of the church is to hold up the source of light – Jesus Christ. Briefly I will make some of the items that John points out to these churches.

1. Ephesus – John commends Ephesus for its works, and its patience. He also commends them for their not bearing them which are evil. He tells of false apostles who came among them and they exposed their lies. But John also had a warning for Ephesus. He told them that *“thou hast left thy first love.”* The first love would be Jesus. The church was doing good work, but it was going through the motions rather than being the Living Church.
2. Smyrna – John commends them for their works, and being steadfast in tribulation, poverty, and against those who blasphemy. He tells Smyrna to *“fear none of those things.”* The people may have become fearful with so much that caused them to struggle.
3. Pergamos – Pergamos had a martyr, and so had received persecution. John commends them for not denying the faith. However, there were some who were struggling with the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. This led them to eat things sacrificed to idols, fornication, and greed. John was telling them to repent from false teachings that had come into their midst.
4. Thyatira – John commends them for their charity, service, faith, patience, and their works. With all that was good John condemns Thyatira for listening to a woman named Jezebel who was teaching seducing doctrines such as fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.
5. Sardis – Sardis is complimented on being alive and not dead. Sardis is encouraged to hold fast, and repent. This church is commanded to watch for the thief coming in the night that may steal that which they have.
6. Philadelphia – This church has an open door that no man can shut. Even in its faithfulness Philadelphia is told that it only has a little strength. This church is given a promise in relationship to the city of God – the New Jerusalem.
7. Laodicea – There is no evidence of being commended. Because they are rich, the people of Laodicea have become lukewarm. In the eyes of the world and those in the church this people might appear to be successful but in the eyes of God he is ready to *“spew thee out of my mouth”*. The Lord counsels them to return to him.

I share this counsel of John for a reason. Individual branches/churches are susceptible to these temptations and more. John spoke to them from outside of the Churches, just like Abinadi did and like Samuel the Lamanite did to different peoples. We help one another and support one another so we don't fall into the snares that could trap us and destroy us. The Scriptures remind us that we are called to be one Church, and not a collection of individual or in other words Independent Restoration Branches. This condition of being one demands from us the need and hopefully the desire to become one.

