

“And So Were the Churches Established in the Faith”

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Once the first century church cleared the air about what the apostles had taught and what they had not taught, the statement is made, “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. *And so were the churches established in the faith*, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:4-5, emphasis added). You see there were some who had been teaching things for the Christians to do concerning which as communicated by the apostles and elders in the decree from Jerusalem, “We gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). Upon reaching that understanding, the way for the growth of the church had been cleared, and the churches “increased in number daily.” Restoring the New Testament church today involves an appreciation of this reality. A tangible barrier is in place anytime teachings arise for which the apostles “gave no such commandment.” While many do not see the harm in doing things for which they have no scriptural support, those who truly want the Lord’s church to grow in the Lord’s way have no interest in such innovations in worship and evangelism. As an encouragement, the lead passage in these comments certifies proof-positive that churches of Christ today can know and upon knowing state with certainty the truth that they are “established in the faith” answering a question that is sometimes asked, “Can we restore the church of Christ today?”

The gleanings from two Bible books will deepen our understanding of the plausibility of returning to the New Testament order today. In I Corinthians, a number of problems plagued that early church. For example, they actually had a couple practicing open fornication about which everyone seemed to be aware (I Cor. 5), and they were guilty of partaking of the Lord’s supper in an unworthy manner (I Cor. 11).

These egregious errors did not negate the fact that Paul was writing to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (I Cor. 1:2) nor did they make such awful practices acceptable to God. Could they be restored to their original position of acceptability before God as the church of God? The Bible gives the answer in II Corinthians 2 where Paul urges the brethren to forgive the repentant brother in verses 6-11. He had been restored to the faith. So, if they could restore the church to its original position of acceptability before God then, even so can it be restored today by returning to the teaching of the Bible.

The second Bible book to consider on this point is the book of Revelation. In chapters 2 and 3 Jesus extends rebuke to five of the seven churches of Asia. Could Christians who were members of those troubled churches be saved? The answer is yes, indeed, provided they would repent of their erroneous practices (cf. Rev. 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19). But, the question arises, “What if they would not repent?” The Lord’s response would be found in the words, “I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (e.g., Rev. 2:5). This is taken to mean that in the absence of repentance they ultimately would be lost. Those within the church who continue unauthorized practices will be lost in the end.

Therefore, the churches of Christ must be established in the faith. The applicable point from the ministry of Christ from the beginning was, “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Mt. 13:41). Unless churches are established in the faith in the judgment those members and entire churches that offend will be “gathered out of his kingdom.” We can and must be established in the faith to inherit eternal life.