

Cutting Wood and Restoring N. T. Christianity

by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

In my early years, before Daddy got steady work in town, we lived in the country and did small time farming. We had neither electricity nor gas at our house. We heated and cooked using wood for fuel. There were two lessons country dads taught their boys about cutting wood to ensure that it was at a consistent length and thus fit nicely into the fireplace and cook stove.

Lesson 1: Do not guess at the length.

The reason for this should be self-evident.

Lesson 2: Measure each cut by the stick he had originally cut and given to you as a pattern.

The reason for this being, if one uses the stick just previously cut for measuring, like measuring cut #3 by #2; #4 by #3; #5 by #4, etc., it won't be long until none of the cuts will conform to the original.

These lessons also applied to cutting lumber for building buildings on the place.

There is a spiritual application in all of this as we go about building up the church in each generation.

Lesson 1: The building up of the Lord's church is not guess work.

There was a pattern cut by the Lord in the New Testament and all succeeding generations are to follow it; rather than guessing what would please the Lord. We can know what pleases him by using the original cut as a pattern. Most of what is done today, under the banner of the Lord, is pure presumption. That ought not to be.

Lesson 2: Each generation must not measure its cut by the cut of the immediate previous generation.

Nor should it go back several generations and cutting by that generation. Such a method will only make the present measurement to be an accumulation of all miscuts that may have been made from the beginning up until the cut being presently used for measurement. Any adjustment that this generation makes must be measured by the original pattern cut by the Lord at the beginning.

We hear a lot about the need to restore New Testament Christianity. This is a noble and needed pursuit, but we need to know what we are seeking to restore. Are we seeking to restore "Pre-papal Christianity" of the 5th and 6th centuries? The "Reformation

Movement Christianity” of the 16th and 17th centuries? Or, the “Restoration Movement Christianity” of the 18th and 19th centuries?

Much that I read about the need for Christians to correct errors that have crept into their preaching and practice leaves the distinct impression that it is a call to go back to the Christianity of the “Restorers” of the 18th and 19th centuries. Like one cutting wood, after having made 100 cuts, each time using the just previous cut as his pattern, deciding to go back to about the 75th and start over from there making his cuts. He will still have any miscuts that may have taken place between the 1st and 75th cut. The only smart thing to do is to use the first stick as pattern and make all cuts by it.

We can and should profit from past generations as well as from those of the present generation. They have contributed to our learning and understanding of New Testament Christianity. I have profited immensely from reading about and from Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, J. W. McGarvey, “Raccoon” John Smith, Granville and David Lipscomb, Tolbert Fanning, etc. They have pointed out things that I might have missed by my independent study, but still I cannot be “of Campbell, of McGarvey, of Smith, nor of Fanning (though his preaching started the congregation where I received most of my early training as a preacher). Nor can I be “of the Restoration Movement” as a whole. I have to be “of Christ” who died for me and revealed his will through the apostles and prophets.

There are two extremes that often happen among my brethren toward what is historically known as the “Restoration Movement.” One extreme is to have such reverence for the Movement, and the men that made it up, that it virtually becomes the pattern which we should seek to duplicate. The other extreme is to have almost a total disdain for the movement and those who made it up.

Let’s make a conscientious and determined effort to avoid either extreme. Let us not blindly follow anything they may have taught, but rather “search the scriptures ... to see if the things are so.” (Acts 17:11). But let us show due respect for the movement and those who made it up, by recognizing and being thankful for their contributions to our understanding of the scriptures.