

Ephrata Church of the Brethren
Tim Doering
Demolishing Strongholds
Restoration

You'll notice that I've chosen to use art as the background for our Power Point slide today. These pieces of art are among many on display at the White Stone gallery in Manayunk, formerly the Lime Street gallery in Lancaster. This is a gallery of biblical fine art. Check it out online at whitestonegallery.com. These particular pieces are part of a current exhibit based on the theme of *Restoration*.

Our theme for today is also *Restoration*. This is the fourth and final installment in our series on *Demolishing Spiritual Strongholds*. Next week we hope to, together, put these messages to work at the Sacred Assembly. In the last three weeks Galen has walked us through the principles of *confession, repentance & accountability*. Today you will find those three principles at work in the text that we look to for a story of *restoration*.

Since the fall of man, restoration has become central to God's work. It is a complicated process that is always in flux. Have any of you ever restored a car? You know that it is often not a science. It is not like the work of an assembly line in a Ford factory. Have any of you restored a house? Like a car, restoring a house takes a different kind of talent than the reproduction of common homes in a new development. Similarly, but much more complicated, is the process of restoration of human life and the church. Each restoration process is dependent on many factors such as the original design (gifts & calling), current state (character & baggage), and present context (kingdom needs in this culture) for each individual, as well as the resources available and many other factors. All of this is to say that restoration is beyond the ability to diagram. Restoration is an art, thus our Power Point slide: the art of *Restoration*.

That being said, rather than spending the majority of our time dissecting & explaining restoration, I think we need to hear a story of it. This takes us to Nehemiah chapter 1.

- **Get with God - Allow his heart to move you** (*Saturate & Connect - be inspired*) – Neh. 1:2
 - o He asks about those in Jerusalem to see how he can help, while he is in the midst of wealth. Looking for God's interest rather than just his own.
 - Then he grieves, though his life is good – vs. 4
 - 4 months of grieving before the king noticed!
 - His gift is Ruler! This is a man of action & he waits.
 - True restoration is a process. There may be moments of enlightenment & action but they are set in the context of saturation

- The most powerful art (music) is full of expression. You must be in it. Experiencing it.
 - Technique (gifts & skills) is a wineskin, but passion/perspective is the wine.
 - Nehemiah connects to the historical working of God, which allows him to get his heart in line with God's and see his sin in line with his forefather's.
 - This also brings the deeper & more ancient element out in this new work.
 - Restoration necessitates something older being renewed
 - Lew & Earla Mae's house – ancient/future
 - What are we a part of that is much bigger and older than ourselves?
 - Creation - God is at work to restore all things to himself
 - That includes:
 - Each of us – we have not arrived!
 - And those people & things that he calls us to
 - His Church – COB as a Restoration movement
 - This church - Galen's first message (Nehemiah)
 - We have to choose to see that, own that, and submit to it.
 - Confess our sin connected to the broader
 - (Me & house)
 - Control over sale vs. loving the boys
 - Giving when it hurts or staying comfortable
- **Depend on God - Look to him for the fulfillment (*Tap in & Submit*)** – Be open to and pursue the transforming work of God – vs. 4-11
- Prayer, fasting, faith & brokenness
 - He lays claims to God's promises, stories, themes, and character.
 - Scripture is his biggest tool here (Deuteronomy)
 - This puts us in a place where God can take our own work to higher levels and do some of his own work too.
 - Our art is just one part of a grand masterpiece. We must submit to and trust the artist in charge
 - Biblical writers like David & Isaiah who may be prophesying about a specific short-term thing but God is at work in something bigger.
 - An artist painting a picture and only afterward realizing that there is more going on it than she was aware of.
- **Join God - Be assertive and obedient in restoration** – (*Co - Create*) – Nehemiah 1:9; 2:1-10
- Only after all of the prayer does he tell us that “oh yea, by the way...I'm the cupbearer.” In other words, I'm the one who can do something about it. But that is irrelevant until I've prayed and now puts an exclamation mark on the faith in that prayer.

- The prayer was the saturation period, but not a way out of action
 - Nehemiah gets personal w/ Artaxerxes (Babylonian king)
 - Journeys back to Jerusalem, leaving luxury and getting persecuted
- Art – join God in creating beauty of our mess - Mozambican weapon art
- When this specific battle is over what will we do? What will take the place of the things that have been strongholds among us? What is God’s heart calling us to? What new lifestyle will we adopt? What will we be assertive with?
- The void left by repentance must be filled with action!
 - Not just switching vices from alcohol to caffeine
 - Crash diets vs. new lifestyles - purpose: looking good (self & vanity) vs. health (love & responsibility)
- Our calling cannot be couched in the simple restrictions. It must be proactive. What is the purpose & vision that God wants to see accomplished in us?
 - Don’t fill the void with random discipline or activity. In order for true restoration the void must be filled with going after his purpose & mission for you and his kingdom.
 - Do we want to not be fat (sinful) or do we want to be healthy (spiritually alive & life giving)
- Pictures for Ephrata:
 - Barnabas: supporter, discipler, birthing place
 - History of image management
 - Opening doors to the most unlikely of people
 - History of control
 - Praying instead of doing
 - History of sexual immorality:
 - Training families in sexual purity
 - History of criticism
 - Get involved & help improve
 - History of comfort
 - When the pressure comes up, don’t bail! Take it to him

Acts 15:16 ‘After these things I will return,
 And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen,
 And I will rebuild its ruins,
 And I will **restore** it.

The following statement was prepared by Paul Hosler in consultation with other leaders of the congregation as a way of summarizing one of the areas of congregational life that needs to be confessed and repented of, and for which we all seek restoration. Paul served as Moderator of the congregation for 8 years, and read this statement this past Sunday, May 11, 2008, during both worship services. Our hope is that this statement helps all of us think about and identify ways in which we may have been involved in church life which we know were not the most productive.

If there are other things you have seen or experienced in church for which we need to confess and repent, please contact any one of the pastors before our Sacred Assembly on May 18. Call 733-1229 or email. Don't forget to identify yourself on all communications.

Stronghold History

God created us in His image and gave us the freedom to choose to live in His image or in some other image. When my ways and my self image become ingrained, we define this as a stronghold where Satan holds a degree of power over us. One of the major spiritual strongholds that works to hinder the Body of Christ is the stronghold of control. This self-centered desire to control what takes place, when and where it takes place, how it takes place and who is putting it in place is the spiritual stronghold of control. The question we must all ask is what part have I played in allowing this satanic stronghold to work at ECOB? In asking this question Satan will attempt to deceive us and control our thinking so we end up deciding we've played little to no part in this stronghold. Therefore I need to ask God to reveal to me through His Holy Spirit how I am or have been a part of this satanic stronghold. Discerning God's answer requires prayerful seeking, searching, reflective thinking, hearing God's voice in the scriptures, listening, and real openness to conviction.

What has taken place in the life of this congregation where you and I have had to choose between obedience to God or obedience to our desires and motives to control? Leadership: change of leadership, influencing leadership, controlling the actions of leadership, talking about leadership. Worship: styles, times, procedures, length, who, how, we and they. Structure/by-laws: control, change, how, vote, not vote. Dress/Attire: respect, attitude, tradition, purpose. Music: acapella, piano, organ, instruments, drums, keyboard, guitar, loud, soft, fast, slow, choir, solo, old, new, screen, book. Building: care, decorating, style, use, who, cost, additions, expansion, C.C. use, pavilion, ball field, parking lot. Children/Youth: leadership, noise, participation, instruction, behavior. Denomination (Church of the Brethren): expectations, financial support, tradition, heritage, participation, non-participation, colleges, conferences, decisions. The list could go on. Did I seek God's will, did I choose to be obedient to His Word, did I act in love and unity?

Have I ever been manipulative or deceptive in seeking to get a decision to my liking? Have I said or done divisive things to accomplish my desires? Have my actions or intentions been exclusive or unkind? Has alienation and disunity ever resulted from my words? What selfish behaviors have I demonstrated that brought about hurt and broken relationships? When have I spoken that which should never have been said? Have I remained silent when the stronghold of control was evident? Did I choose to do nothing? What dominates my thought life?

Whenever I work or play for the purpose of self-focus I have given a place to the controlling spirit. Is my first love Jesus? Do I seek God's desire and wisdom when making decisions? Is the guidance of the Holy Spirit my contact for thinking, saying, acting, and being. Is the Bible my daily teacher, my test of the spirits, the light and guide for my life?

It boils down to my way, controlling what I can, or God's way, giving my thoughts and actions, my life to Him in love by serving others. Our ECOB history has many demonstrations of God's love in action. Our history also has many demonstrations of controlling strongholds. We celebrate the results of God's love in our history and we need to confess the strongholds of our history. Just as we celebrate both as a body and individually, so we also need to confess both as a body of Christ and individually. Confession, agreeing with God and naming our stronghold of control, leads us to repentance; turning from self and choosing God's way. Choosing God's way means getting honest with other key people in our lives; accountability.