

Early Friends/Quakers lived with a sense that the Kingdom of God was now!

They were aware that God's order was imminent and breaking open in their midst
They experienced the transforming power and grace of God in their own lives
But they also believed that this same transforming power of God was at work in the world
It was transforming the world in which they lived—the social, political, economic world
The old, unjust and ungodly structures in their world were found wanting and faced judgment
God's Order—the Gospel Order was at hand—The Day of the Lord was at hand

Early Friends participated directly in this new Gospel Order

They worshipped in a different manner
They dressed differently
They spoke differently
They bought and sold things differently
Every area of life had been transformed as they were faithful to Leadings

For early Friends the power of the presence of Christ in their midst changed everything

Religion was not about some future event—nor about the past
It was the imminent presence of God in the now—speaking to people in that present moment
Believing that Christ had fully come—they did not have to wait for more of God to come

For George Fox, Gospel Order was not simply being orderly—but it was also the transforming experience

...I was first moved of the Lord God, to go up and down the nation to preach the Gospel, then after[wards] the Lord moved me to go up and down to exhort and unite, that all people might come into the possession of the Gospel, and the Order of it, which is the Power of God ... by which all things are upheld and ordered to the Glory of God.¹

Christ is the reconciler of all creation to the Creator—restoring all things to right order

—restoring all things to their original intent

The Genesis account records God as saying that everything was good—in perfect order
With the “Fall of Adam” the perfect order of creation is broken—trust is broken
But Quakers believed that God's power could return them to this divine order before the fall
To this place in Christ where all was as God intended

George Fox wrote in his Journal...

“Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocence, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell... But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall.”²

Attempts to “fix things” other than by returning to the full original intent fall short of God's power

The Jewish law of the Old Testament falls short
Even the attempts of Paul and others in the New Testament are limited if they stop short

¹George Fox, Epistle 313, *The Power of the Lord is Over All, the Pastoral Letters of George Fox*, ed. T. Canby Jones (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1989), p. 312.

² George Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, ed. John L. Nickalls, (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1985), p. 27.

of fully restoring a life simply based on trust in the Living God
When we get caught up in the “rules” we fall short of God’s intent—even good rules
Early Friends understood that it was in Jesus Christ that the transformation was present

1. Knowing that there is way back

2. The way back is through trust in Christ/God/Spirit

It is that simple—choosing to trust in the Presence in our midst

Listening to that still small voice—the Inner Light—Inner Witness

In going back into this place of Gospel Order—of the full original intent of God—it changes everything

It isn’t just a personal transformation that changes me

It applies to every aspect of life

It impacts the culture and social customs as well

As we come into this new order—we see that there is a new Gospel Order for all of creation

In that way, Quakers began to live according to this Gospel Order

Even when it was in direct conflict with the laws of the day, or the customs of the day

These different ways of living became known as the religious testimonies

It was how they lived out their understandings of what it meant to live Gospel Order

This full Gospel Order is available now! It is not simply some future paradise

This was the power of the early Quaker message—they lived it in their lives now

And it was available to everyone on earth

Unlike common religious thought that limited it to the chosen few

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. John 1:9 NRSV

More of God is not necessary—we already have all of God present to us now

God is not absent or silent—we don’t always Listen well

As we live in the fullness of Gospel Order now—we live the Kingdom of God now...

It is our witness to the world that God is present and actively restoring creation to its full order³

The Presence in the Midst *This picture was painted by a Friend named James Doyle Penrose. He was born in England in 1862 and died in 1921. He said this about his picture.*

“One beautiful summer day I went over to Jordan [a Friends Meetinghouse near London, England] and, quite alone, sat down in the seat from which the picture was painted. I seemed, as I contemplated all those who had worshiped there in the past, to be surrounded by them in imagination as if they were gathered there. I pondered on what it was that gave them all their power, for they had power in those bygone times, and then I realized that it was the presence of Christ amongst them — ‘The Presence in the Midst.’ And I felt there was a subject I ought to paint, however inadequate I felt for the task; and I did feel that it was a very great undertaking.

“The sunlight streaming through the window threw the shadow of the casement mullion and transom on the wall, and although I was not conscious of it at the time, it must have been an unconscious inspiration, for years afterwards it was pointed out to me that this shadow was a cross — an empty cross. The work on the cross was a finished work of redemption, and now He, who once hung there, was the risen, living Christ whose presence may be relied upon where two or three are gathered in His name.”

³ Sources...

A Lasting Gift: The Journal and Selected Writings of Sandra L. Cronk, edited by Martha Paxson Grundy
Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order by Lloyd Lee Wilson