

# **OUR HERITAGE OF UNITY AND FELLOWSHIP**

Writings of

Leroy Garrett and W. Carl Ketcherside

Edited and Published by

**Cecil Hook**

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## DEDICATION

In admiration  
for their roles as humble peacemakers,  
their acceptance of all those in Christ,  
and their courage to tear down divisive walls,  
this volume is lovingly dedicated to

Leroy Garrett,  
who shares the common life in Christ  
with all His disciples on earth,  
and to

William Carl Ketcherside,  
who is enjoying blissful fellowship  
with the redeemed  
from every age and nation and tribe  
and tongue and people  
in heaven.

# Introduction

*Cecil Hook*

When Leroy Garrett challenged me to edit a book from his writings and those of Carl Ketcherside, my first impulse was to shrink from it. To create a book on the subject of our heritage of unity and fellowship sounded like an idea whose time has come, but that would be a job beyond my capability. Only after Leroy's further persuasion and days of my contemplating the project have I agreed to undertake this.

My anxiety has been that I would not be able to edit material to represent properly their efforts to direct us back to our roots. I have not yet overcome that apprehension.

My intimidation is born of the deep respect and admiration that I feel toward Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett and their influential ministries. I am only one of the many who owes much to each of them for giving me clearer insights. They have been God's prophets crying out to a divided church in the last half of this century. They have understood the Biblical basis for unity and the purposes of the Stone-Campbell Movement to restore it.

Their mission has put them in front of and above the crowd to receive the slings and arrows of fellow-disciples who have misunderstood or prejudged their messages. Although they accepted and ministered to all segments of the Restoration heritage, because they refused to be confined by the sectarian walls that divide us, they were not fully accepted by any of the separated groups. But the Spirit is working exciting change among us at this time giving fruit to the seed they have sown.

This is not a book of history primarily; yet some narratives of the past are necessary to reveal the legacy of unity and fellowship which we may claim. And those are exciting chapters.

Most of this material first appeared in Garrett's *Restoration Review* or Ketcherside's *Mission Messenger*. Thirty-three years separate the oldest and the newest chapters.

Having to select so little from the abundance of their relevant material has been a perplexing task. Other writers would do well to compile their articles on other vital subjects. Because these essays are from different writers produced in different decades, the continuity does not flow as it would if one person wrote a book on this theme. There will be some overlapping, some redundancy, and perhaps some gaps. The repetition, however, can serve well to emphasize matters which they considered vital.

I have used more of Leroy's material than Carl's, not out of favoritism, but because it fitted the contextual need better. Also, I have used graphics from Leroy because they are available. Carl used none in his publication.

This is a compilation without commentary, critique, or evaluation. You do not need my help in these areas. If in your reading you perceive an inconsistency, please look at the date when the ideas were expressed which may reveal a maturing of concepts over the years. Also consider that some

terms like *fellowship* and *heretic* may be used variously to reflect either the true definition or the commonly perceived meaning.

I first thought I would integrate sections from various essays in order to create a smoother flow of ideas, but that would have injected too much of the editor into their writings. It would have compromised their styles, their flow of thought, and the purity of their literary pieces. So this material is all theirs, punctuation and all. Carl and I seem to have attended different schools of grammar! I was tempted to add punctuation all along but refrained from it because his punctuation fitted his flow of speech. Anyway, when he ceased to write, he must have had a bin full of unused commas left over.

I must pause here for some personal expression. I feel that it is an undeserved honor to have my name on the cover of this volume with these two heroic, yet humble peacemakers. During the months of my work on this project, Leroy has encouraged me when I faltered and offered wise suggestions when I asked for advice. He has trusted me with personal copies of his and Carl's materials.

You will want to join me in thanking Kay Strobeck of Strobeck Designs in Portland, Oregon for her artistic cover design. She created it without charge as an expression of her admiration for Carl and Leroy and in appreciation of their liberating ministries. I benefit greatly from her generous spirit. I planned to put the men's portraits on the cover but Leroy is so free from conceit and vanity that he argued against it.

My affection and thanks go to Mira Prince, our daughter of Tigard, Oregon, for her much loving labor in preparing the camera-ready copy. And Lea, my loving companion of forty-six years, has been and continues to be an equal partner in this and all of our ministry together. I am blessed beyond measure by her devotion.

No doubt, some of you have known these two men much longer and more intimately than I have. But for those who are not acquainted with them, a brief introduction of each man will be in order.

## **Leroy Garrett**

Most scholars of the Bible and church history have been religious professionals. Here is a man, however, who has made his living teaching philosophy while becoming a scholar in these other fields also. He loves the legacy of the Stone-Campbell Movement with its pure intentions. As a student of philosophy he understands the influence of the great thinkers on the leaders of the movement. In gaining his higher education he has been exposed to every subtle expression of doubt, skepticism, and atheism but he has held to his simple faith and acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God.

Leroy Garrett was born in Mineral Wells, Texas on December 11, 1918 (eighteen days after my birth) and grew up in Dallas in the noninstrument Church of Christ. He is tall and lanky as a Texan should be, and though he speaks with deliberation, he does not have a Texas drawl. At 72 his strong body is kept in shape by his arising early each morning for a two mile jog. Then he reads, studies and writes.

He and Ouida are most hospitable in their modest two story house where their double garage is converted into an office with crowded shelves and stacks of books and other reading materials. Leroy often mentions Ouida with praise in his writings. They have reared three adopted children: Phoebe, Philip, and David Benjamin. Ouida has done much of the work in publishing *Restoration Review* and keeping office. She has also cared for her aged mother the last ten years.

Leroy attended Freed-Hardeman College, Abilene Christian University, Southern Methodist University, Princeton Seminary, and Harvard University where he received his Ph.D. Throughout his career, he has been *Dr. Garrett* on campus but is simply *Leroy* to his Christian brothers and sisters.

Beside his teaching at Texas Woman's University in Denton, he has taught at Alabama Christian College, MacMurray College, Bethany College, and Bishop College, and he still teaches part-time at Dallas Christian College. In the field of philosophy he conducted research in teaching gifted students in three high schools on a grant by Lilly Endowment.

Because of his modest nature, we might not have appreciated that he can play with the big boys in the field of philosophy, such as when he participated in an annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Yale University. He can converse in their technical language and then write so simply that we lesser minds can comprehend.

Once Leroy was one of a group of American professors to have audience with Chiang Kai Shek in Taiwan. He has dined with university presidents, deans, scholars, and poets in nations around the world. He has visited with Paul Tillich, William Barclay, Nels Ferre, Henry Cadbury, and Harry and Bonara Overstreet. He thoroughly enjoys visits in the homes of disciples, and it is a delight to visit with him.

Although he will joke and talk trivia with you, because of his intense spiritual nature, he soon has you back on some subject of deeper meaning. As you ride along with him he may read to you some challenging material, such as Barclay's book of prayers. He is gracious when mention is made of any who reject and oppose him because of his teachings. That indicates much maturity, for in earlier years he entered into the rough-and-tumble debating of factional issues.

He has participated in seminars and unity forums in various countries. At his own expense and with great delight he has conducted many minimeetings in homes. His interest in unity has involved him with leaders of all segments of the Restoration Movement. Although he harbors no sectarian spirit, he is a member of the Singing Oaks Church of Christ (noninstrumental) in Denton, Texas without apology. He believes that reformation must come from within. Because of his loving nature, learning, and association, he is able to deal with people of varying views with fairness and with sincere feeling for the persons involved. This generous spirit is evident in his THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT where he represents fairly each separated group without cosmetics or censure. Leroy has visited in the services of every religious body in Denton in an outreach to all other believers promoting understanding and unity.

Leroy has an easy, friendly, conversational method of writing. He makes history live in the mind of his readers by his anecdotal style which relates historical incidents to the persons involved.

At times I thought that Leroy was a bit devilish in throwing out ideas which he knew his readers might not accept. But I came to realize that he only wants us to probe and explore new ideas. If he just says what we agree with, he might as well close shop. So he always stays a few jumps ahead of many of us to lead the way to discovery. He disturbs our superficialities.

These lines chosen from various essays seem to express Leroy Garrett's "editorial policy." "Publishing a journal is to send something of one's self into the lives of multitudes of people. An utterly delightful experience!" An editor must have "not just the courage of his conviction, but the courage to examine his convictions." It is not "what will they think of me if I publish this, but is it true, and is it important?" "An editor dares to think, to grow, and to change even though false motives will be attributed to him." "If you are edified in reading it, we will be glad. If you are disturbed we take heart. If nothing happens, we will take stock."

With the anticipated sending out of Volume 34, Number 10; December, 1992, Leroy Garrett plans to cease publication of *Restoration Review* after 40 years, counting his earlier *Bible Talk*. A number of those volumes have been bound in book form. His **THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT, An Anecdotal History of Three Churches** is being revised for reprinting after its wide acceptance.

May God give him many more happy years of effective leadership toward unity. He should give us an autobiography!

### William Carl Ketcherside

"I was born early in the morning of May 10, 1908, in a little two-room miner's cabin in a poverty-stricken village called Cantwell, nestled in the eastern foothills of the Missouri Ozarks." Thus Carl Ketcherside begins his most interesting and informative life story.

When he discontinued his monthly journal, *Mission Messenger*, in December, 1975 after 37 years of publication, his good friend, Leroy Garrett, insisted that he write his autobiography. This Carl did in 60 installments which Leroy published serially in *Restoration Review*. Carl calls his life story "A Pilgrimage of Joy" and it was published in book form in 1991 by College Press under that title.

When he was a small boy, he was recognized as being "different" because of his fascination with printed words. In learning to read in early childhood he would ask any literate visitor in the home to read the item descriptions in the mail order catalog. At the age of five he was going to the company store for his mother because she could not read English. He would ask the clerk to read labels to him. The keeper of the store would save unclaimed mail to serve as reading material for the child.

Carl's first store-bought clothes were a pair of knickerbockers to wear to his first day in the little two-room school. Even the first years of his high school education were in a two-room school.

At the age of ten when the family moved to Marshalltown, a new world opened to him. The town had a free Carnegie Library. He would read a book a day and sometimes more! In his lifelong insatiable appetite for knowledge, he devoured books in uncounted numbers.

The Sunday after his baptism at the age of twelve he read the scripture lesson in the assembly. A week later a visiting preacher announced without consulting Carl that he would speak at the evening service one month later. After preaching to an overflow crowd, others made appointments for him in their congregations. He was soon preaching each Sunday and by his thirteenth birthday he was scheduled for summer meetings in three states. It was in one of these meetings that the church folk surprised him with a new three-piece suit including the first long pants he had ever owned. He still had two more years in high school which were to be completed in a larger school in Topeka. He graduated from a business school in Topeka but never received a college education. Nor did he need one!

While in a meeting in Flat River, Missouri at the age of nineteen, he met Nellie Watts who became his companion for sixty years. Their two children are Jerry and Sue (Burton).

Carl Ketcherside was endowed with rare gifts from his Creator. He was keenly intelligent, strong in body, commanding in presence, the master of every situation, reverent by nature, outgoing in personality, optimistic, witty, happy, and broad in self education through reading and experience. He spoke without notes with flawless diction, beautiful imagery, and pithy statements. He would call upon both secular and religious history, world literature, Greek and Roman mythology, the thoughts of philosophers, and modern scientific achievements as background material for many of his points.

Thirty-four books came from his pen including bound volumes of *Mission Messenger*. Thousands of his books were distributed free.

In his earlier years Carl became “a factionalist of the factionalists,” a “wing commander” of one of our narrowest divisions, to use his own self descriptions. He forcefully debated issues with brethren who disagreed doctrinally. Later, he confessed to having taken pride in this role of championing an exclusive sect.

But this all changed dramatically in Belfast, Ireland in a cold chapel on March 27, 1951. After a sleepless night of agonizing, the Lord knocked on the door of his heart and he invited Jesus into his life. Gone forever was his sectarian spirit. Many times later he would confess with shame the misguided, divisive nature of his former course. From then on he would love and accept all of God’s people and proclaim the unity for which Jesus prayed and which the Spirit creates. From that night forward he would be the lover to accept rather than the lawyer to judge. He would say, “Wherever God has a child, I have a brother or sister.” When asked about accepting “brothers in error,” he would reply, “That is the only kind of brothers I have!”

Carl was tireless in his travels, speaking, writing, and correspondence. Many of us were surprised that each time we wrote a note to him, he wrote in response, either in perfect penmanship or on his typewriter that needed cleaning. He wrote many such notes daily to encourage and to commend.

This man who could display no college diploma was called upon to speak on more than 250 college and university campuses – including Harvard! He was speaking at Harvard the afternoon before the sit-ins and walkouts of the 1960’s took place, and he sat in on the meeting between the rebellious students and the faculty. He could and did communicate effectively with the hippie generation, even staying in three communes, and he was instrumental in converting rock bands to Jesus.

Leroy Garrett speaks of his intimate friend, writing, “He is another that could not produce a college diploma if his life depended upon it, and he too grew up in poverty. And yet he knows more than a whole roster of Ph.D’s. I have “walked with kings” in these professional meetings and at several universities, and I have sat with scholars renowned the world over, but I have not yet met the man that is superior to Carl Ketcherside in intellectual grace.”

During the last six years of his earthly service, he crowned his far reaching ministry by putting into practice the most basic concept of Jesus. He and Nell worked out of a storefront called *Cornerstone* in the inner city of St. Louis helping the poor, the homeless, the alcoholic, the drug-addicted, and all others who need love. Invitations to speak as he had done through the years were turned down so that he could work in this humblest expression of the love of Jesus. While in this ministry, he was called home on May 14, 1989. His beloved Nell was waiting to welcome him, having preceded him the year before.

### **Carl and Leroy**

These two men were close friends for nearly 40 years and served together in various forums and seminars. They were friends to all but owned by none. Each had a deep appreciation of our heritage of unity and fellowship. They both matured beyond their beginnings to become the outstanding envoys of peace in the last half of this century. They pointed us back to unity in spite of diversity – a concept which was taught and practiced by our forbears and the apostles.

In order that their message might have free course, both of these men have left their writings without copyright restrictions.

Leroy wrote this note to me which deals with a watershed in their careers:

“I am often asked at what point Carl and I turned our ministry in a different direction and what was the circumstance. In 1957 Carl and I had a debate on instrumental music with Don DeWelt and Seth Wilson, professors at Ozark Christian College, in Nowata, Oklahoma. In preparation for this debate I wrote Carl and suggested that this should be a different kind of debate in that we should not make the issue a debated test of fellowship. I further told Carl that I thought we should accept Don and Seth as our brothers in Christ, the same as we accepted each other as brothers, making no difference. We would show our love toward them as much as toward each other. We would discuss the issue for the mutual benefit of all, but would draw no lines.

Without responding to my letter and without telling me in advance, Carl opened the debate by reading my letter to the vast audience from Churches of Christ and Christian Churches that had assembled in the city’s Fair Grounds. He endorsed what I had said and emphasized that this was a different kind of a debate in that we were drawing no lines of fellowship over the issue being discussed, but that it was a brotherly effort to learn more truth on a controversial issue. It set a tone for the debate that was vastly different from previous debates.

From that point on our efforts moved in a different direction. While there was never any collusion on what we would say in our papers (I never knew what was in his paper until it came in the mail, and he didn’t know in advance what I would say in mine), we pursued the same goals and wrote on similar subjects.”

When a person denounces a former party and seeks to bring about reform, former admirers find it hard to forgive him. Inquisitions are instituted against him. The orthodox of any institution always seeks to destroy the wisest and noblest of its princes who would dare to challenge and reform. Many times these men have been misrepresented and denounced by name from pulpits and journals by men who had never heard or read their messages. But both Carl and Leroy were insulated from such attacks by their unfeigned love for all for whom Christ died. They continued tirelessly to remind us of our legacy of unity and fellowship.

In 1988 at a seminar at the Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Carl and Leroy were presented "Marty" awards. These were artfully designed metallic plaques given in a tongue-in-cheek recognition of those who almost become martyrs but do not quite make it! The awards were appropriate.

Praise the Lord, many are now rising up to call them blessed.

*(October 1991)*

## Chapter 1

# It Began In Scotland

*Leroy Garrett*

It is always risky to attempt to pinpoint the exact moment of any significant movement in history. I shall take that risk, however, for it should prove to be both interesting and helpful to be able to look back upon a single instance in history as the beginning of our Restoration Movement. I say *our* in reference to the Campbell-Stone reformatory efforts of last century, of which the Christian Churches-Churches of Christ are heirs. Most of us are aware of various restoration efforts through the centuries, and few there are of us who suppose that ours is the only such effort. But it is *ours* that we are studying in this series, so that we might better understand where we came from and where we ought to be going. In our first installment we got a general view of restoration efforts up to the American Revolution. Now we are ready to see how the Campbell-Stone effort itself got off the ground, developed, and went on to have the impact it had. And in this installment I propose to describe the precise incident that spurred our Movement into existence, along with the attending circumstances.

To do this sort of thing is a bit arbitrary perhaps. It is like naming the starting point of the Protestant Reformation or the American Revolution. If one points to the moment that Luther nailed the 95 theses to the cathedral door in Wittenburg as the start of the Reformation, he is not necessarily ignoring the influence of a Wycliffe or a Tyndale. He is only saying that incident provided the spark, without which it would have been a different story.

Some historians prefer to date the American Revolution from that moment in Concord when “the shot was fired heard around the world.” I would date it from that day when the colonists met to ratify the Declaration of Independence, the exact moment being when John Hancock, the president of the Congress, took pen in hand and became the first of 56 signers. “There,” he said, imposing his bold and graceful signature on the document, “King George can read it without his spectacles, and he can raise the price of 500 pounds he now has on my head!” That was a great moment, a moment in which a new nation was born.

Our Movement began with a similarly dramatic moment and with the same kind of moral courage. The year was 1809, the place Glasgow, Scotland. The occasion was the semi-annual communion service of the Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church. Eight hundred Scots had gathered for the occasion, a service restricted to that particular sect, which fastidiously excluded even other kinds of Presbyterians. But one of them, a 21-year old student at Glasgow University, lately come from Ireland, was troubled with gnawing doubts about breaking bread in such a sectarian atmosphere. Having been examined by the elders and found worthy of communion, he had been given a metal token by which he could gain access to the service. Token in hand, he waited for the last of eight or nine tables to be served, hoping he might resolve his doubts in those last moments.

With doubts still plaguing him, he dropped the token in the plate as it came by, but refused to break the bread or drink the cup, realizing as he did then that it was a communion with Christ from which other believers were barred. He turned away and walked out – and life was never again the same

for Alexander Campbell. His biographer and physician, Robert Richardson, wrote of that occasion: “It was at this moment that the struggle in his mind was completed, and the ring of the token, falling upon the plate, announced the instant at which he renounced Presbyterianism forever – the leaden voucher becoming thus a token not of communion but of separation.”

We’ll let that “moment” be the beginning of the Restoration Movement in America. I realize that James O’Kelly and Barton Stone, along with many others, had already begun their labors in the New World. Even Alexander’s own father was having experiences at that very time which were crucial to the making of our Movement. But it took Alexander Campbell to make the Movement what it came to be, and the turning point in his life was that dramatic moment in which he turned his back against the party of his fathers and resolved to be a free man in Christ. He was as uncertain as to what the future might bring as was John Hancock when he signed the *Declaration*.

### **Unplanned Circumstances**

The circumstances that brought Alexander to Glasgow, completely unplanned by his family, were surely providential. His father left his pastorate in Ahorey, Ireland for America in 1807, a move that would hopefully improve his health and liberate him from both the religious and political strife that then taxed Ireland. The family, Alexander being the eldest, would follow once a new home was in order. A wreck in the Irish sea interrupted these plans. It also wrenched from Alexander a vow that he would give his life to God as a minister of the gospel if he were spared, a resolution that his father had long hoped for, but which, until then, had not been forthcoming.

The delay in sailing for America enabled Alexander to study for upwards of a year at Glasgow. The university courses themselves seem to have had only a normal influence on him. Now 20, he had long been acquainted with books and study habits due to the influence of his scholarly father. It was the extra-curricular activities that had their impact and turned his life around, especially the “house church” that he attended in the home of one Greville Ewing. It was through him that he became acquainted with the principles of reform being advocated in those days by Robert and James Haldane.

It was only 17 years after John Hancock signed the *Declaration* that Greville Ewing was ordained as a minister in the Church of Scotland, his first charge being Lady Glenorchy’s chapel in Edinburgh. It was at this time that the Haldane movement began to be felt as an effort to reform the church. The two brothers always insisted that they were bringing no new doctrines but were seeking to complete the reformation begun by Luther and Knox. Ewing was affected by their efforts, and he did his thing by editing a paper, *Missionary Magazine*, the purpose of which was to arouse a decadent church as to its real mission in the world. More importantly, Ewing reflected the spirit of reform as advocated by the Haldanes, who were his close friends, and this was most evident in the intimate gatherings in his home. It was here that Alexander got hooked on restoration ideas, for he was often a guest in the Ewing home, and he came to admire his host greatly. This was no doubt part of what bothered him as he prepared to break bread with his own sect of Seceder Presbyterians. He knew that Greville Ewing, the Haldanes, and the great host of Scottish reformers that he had come to know, could not join him around the Lord’s table. They were not in the right party!

## The Haldanes

The Haldanes were something else, and they make a story all their own – their biographies being written in their own time give testimony to this. They were sons of a famous British admiral, and they themselves gained honors at sea. They took the wealth left them by their father and became even richer, especially Robert, the older one. The spiritual training given them by their mother at last had its effect, turning them from a career at sea to Christian ministry. God often works through common folk, and it was a stone mason who caused Robert Haldane to turn to Jesus and to his mother's early influence. And when he turned he really turned! "Christianity is everything or nothing," he told himself, and if it is everything, it should command every sacrifice. From that moment on Robert Haldane poured his great wealth, his life, his blood – *literally* – into the Restoration Movement.

He financed a mission to India, liquidating some of his most valuable property to do so. It was at last blocked by the East India Company, which must have been the Lord's doings, for this turned him to missions in Scotland itself and especially to the reformation of the church. He funded publications, built training schools, erected large tabernacles, supported evangelists, financed a home missionary society, and once brought 35 children from Africa and educated them in Scottish culture for several years. While he left it to his brother James to do most of the public speaking, he himself participated until he was compelled to refrain due to coughing up blood.

The Haldanes first attracted attention through their emphasis on lay preaching. Though neither of them was an ordained minister, they went into the highways and byways of their native Scotland proclaiming their message of reform. Others joined them – laymen preaching the gospel! Great multitudes heard them. Soon the clergy became alarmed and efforts were made to stop their unauthorized preaching. "It is not our desire to form or to extend the influence of any sect," they told the people, "but to make known the evangelical gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." School teachers and day laborers were sent out as preachers, along with efforts to train them as preachers of the word. Greville Ewing had one such school in Glasgow, which was moved to Edinburgh before Campbell arrived.

All this led to vast changes in their lives. Both the Haldanes and Greville Ewing left the Church of Scotland. Several independent congregations emerged, the first being in Edinburgh. They called it a Congregational Church. James Haldane was its pastor, a position he held for 52 years. He was still there when Alexander Campbell revisited Scotland 40 years later!

It was James Haldane who was first immersed. He told his congregation that he could no longer baptize babies, and by the time Alexander came to Glasgow he had been immersed. Afterwards, Robert also submitted to immersion. So were other leaders in the free congregations, one being John Campbell, an iron worker by trade, who had tremendous influence. So were some clergymen, such as Dr. Innes, who encouraged the Haldanes, and who at last left the Church of Scotland. There is no evidence that I have found, however, that Greville Ewing was ever immersed, which may help explain why the Campbells were another five years being immersed. But Mr. Ewing did introduce weekly communion in his Glasgow congregation, though there is no evidence that Alexander was ever in attendance.

The churches started by John Glas and his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman, were also part of this picture, though a separate movement from the Haldanes. Many of these also adopted immersion, and they came to be known as Scotch Baptists. Their influence upon Campbell was less dramatic than that of the Haldanes, though he became well acquainted with their views.

The Haldane influence is evident in the following respects:

1. Their non-sectarian approach, their freedom and independence from authoritarian religion, their break with the state church.
2. Their appeal to the scriptures, alone, apart from creeds.
3. Their “lay ministry,” a restoration of universal priesthood, their challenge of clerical prerogatives.
4. Their church order of rule by elders, independent congregations, pastoral function of elders and mutual edification. One William Ballentine, a Haldane, caused division in the Movement by insisting that all members, even incompetent ones, had to speak in the assembly. But the Haldanes opposed this, saying only able teachers are to speak, along with elders. This was later to be Campbell’s view also, as well as the early Movement in this country.
5. Their eventual practice of immersion, though this did not become general, nor was it made a test of fellowship. It was made a matter of forbearance, which was the position of the Campbells in the early years.
6. The gradual emergence of weekly communion, in some churches at least, including the Glasite group, which also followed the exact “order” as outlined in Acts 2:42.

Well, this isn’t the whole story, but it is enough to understand why young Alex was hardly prepared to go on with the sectarianism of his youth, just as with a lot of folk today. Too much was going on in his world! He couldn’t bask in the warmth of spiritual freedom in Ewing’s home, and zero in on all the Haldanes were up to, and still play the sectarian game carried on by his own little sect. So, he walked out in to a new world, a new direction. The sound of that token on the plate is still reverberating. Can’t you hear it?

The Lord was always good to Alexander Campbell. Before sending him to America, he allowed him to relax in a world of young women for a spell. Once through at Glasgow and free of the Presbyterians, he was asked to tutor a bevy of lovely girls in Helensburgh, up north on the sea opposite Greenock, a place much like heaven. He had the women all to himself, the men having to be away in Glasgow. It was a highly cultivated and refined society. He later complained of having to walk the girls in the woods as well as tutor them. He insisted that he had rather be reading and meditating! But we may question that, for he likely relished every minute of it, just as he did all of life.

And surely I have missed it. That must be where the Restoration Movement really began. There in Dumbartonshire, on the shore of the Clyde, in the shady groves around Helensburgh, amidst all those pretty girls. How could I ever have figured it otherwise!

While he was frolicking with those lovely lasses, his father was having a peck of trouble in the New World. He, like John Hancock, had put his name to a *Declaration*, and it too meant war. We'll look in on it in our next issue.

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 19, No. 2; Feb. 1976)

## Chapter 2

# Thomas Campbell Writes His Declaration of Independence

*Leroy Garrett*

He actually called it the *Declaration and Address*, but there is reason to believe that he was influenced by that document that gave birth to our nation in his selection of a title for the document that gave birth to our Movement. They were both a declaration of independence – freedom from tyranny and oppression and freedom to be an individual before God.

A committee led by Thomas Jefferson worked through the hot summer of 1776 to produce the first, only to have every line it wrote brutally scrutinized by the Continental Congress. Thomas Campbell toiled through the hot summer of 1809, stashed away as he was in a lonely attic, to turn out the second, only to have it tried and tested by the Christian Association of Washington that had helped to bring it to birth. Our nation would never have formed without the first; our Movement would never have emerged without the second.

They were both a *declaration*, with all that term means to courageous souls; they were both for *independence*, with all that word means to tired men who long to be free.

“When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary...” began that declaration penned by Thomas Jefferson in 1776. “From the series of events which have taken place in the churches for many years, we are persuaded that it is high time for us not only to think, but also to act ...” began that declaration written by Thomas Campbell in 1809.

Both documents talked about rights. Jefferson wrote of “the right of the people” to redress wrongs against them. Campbell wrote of how “No man has a right to judge his brother.”

Both declarations burned in righteous anger over the injustices imposed upon an innocent people. Jefferson referred to the “long train of abuses and usurpations” that reduce a people to absolute despotism, and he called for their peace and security. Campbell insisted that he was “tired and sick of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit,” and he asked that the churches might have rest from it all.

The first declaration gave our nation its greatest political principle: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Jefferson originally began with: *We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable ...*

The second declaration gave our Movement its greatest spiritual principle: “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one: consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures,

and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.”

Jefferson concluded the first declaration by “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions.” Campbell concluded the second declaration by noting that the unity movement he was launching would “rely upon the all-sufficiency of the Church’s Head; and, through his grace, looking with an eye of confidence to the generous liberality of the sincere friends of Christianity.”

Both documents say in essence: *We do hereby declare that we are a free people!*

The events leading up to the composition of the *Declaration and Address* show Thomas Campbell to be a man of great integrity, sound scholarship, and intense piety. Born in 1763 in Ireland of Roman Catholic parents who turned Anglican, he became a Presbyterian and after a few years of teaching school decided to enter the ministry. He spent three years studying classics at Glasgow, and then took the seminary course of his own church in nearby Whitburn. This means that while Irish by birth he was Scottish by education, and there is evidence that he was strongly influenced by the “common sense” school of philosophy, led by Thomas Reid of Glasgow, which was then dominant and which supported Scottish theologians in their struggle with David Hume, the old Scot who was known as the great infidel.

He was always a teacher as well as a pastor, conducting private schools of his own both in Ireland and America. He was teaching at a sleepy little village named Ballymena, in what is now North Ireland, when he met and married Jane Corneigle, in whose veins flowed French Huguenot blood, and it was here that his eldest son, Alexander, was born in 1788. He later taught at Market Hill in Armagh county, at which time he became the pastor at Ahorey, a few miles distant. In company with the present pastor at Ahorey, Dr. Scott, I was recently privileged to visit both Market Hill and Ahorey. The little town of Market Hill is now barricaded, due to the civil war, but it is not too different from what it was in Campbell’s day. The house where he conducted his school still stands, freshly painted and well preserved, now housing a quiet little business.

He was pastor at Ahorey from 1798 until 1807, at which time he embarked for this country. The church has always been Presbyterian (now the United Presbyterian Church of Ireland), and it has continued without interruption all these years. Dr. Scott has been pastor for 18 years and he has great interest in its Campbell heritage. The environment is still rural, with its rolling hills and white farm houses stretching in all directions, not unlike the terrain in western Pennsylvania and Bethany to which the Campbells eventually came.

The church has a Campbell Tower, built in recent years by Disciples of this country. (Perry Gresham of Bethany, who led the subscription drive, wanted me to check to make sure it was there!) The foyer, below the tower, has a brass relief of Thomas’ likeness gracing a wall, noting the years of his pastorate and acknowledging his role as founder of the Christian Church in America. The old pews, each having its own little door, will seat about 125. Here the Campbells themselves once sat, and it was here that Alexander, then in his impressionable teens, heard his father’s scholarly and devotional presentations. A stained glass window now honors the son. The present pulpit area and additional space have since been built, but the main part of the small church is much like it was then. The cemetery around it has graves that antedate the Campbells.

Even in Ireland, where there was both political and religious unrest, Thomas worked for church union. He was sent by his own Anti-Burgher Presbyterian Church to Glasgow for unity consultation with the Burgher Presbyterian Church (the difference was political rather than doctrinal). The Haldane reformation, which so much influenced Alexander in Glasgow, also reached into Ireland and touched Thomas' life. The church still stands in Market Hall where the reformers often spoke, particularly Rowland Hill, whom Thomas heard and met. Before he left the Old World he was acquainted with the views of Glas, Sandeman, and James Haldane.

## **A Turning Point**

It is noteworthy that both Thomas and Alexander found turning points in reference to the Lord's Supper. We saw in our last how Alexander walked out of a communion service in Glasgow in protest of its sectarian character, leaving the Presbyterians forever. His father, about the same time, had a similar experience in reference to the Supper, which led to his separation from the same sect.

Once in this country, he was received into the Associate Synod of North America, which represented all Seceder Presbyterians, the "Burgher" dispute not having been imported. He was assigned to the Presbytery of Chartiers in western Pennsylvania, which appointed him to an itinerant ministry among Irish immigrants in what was then frontier country. He was among many of his own people, some having immigrated from his own part of Ireland. His views, already expanding back in Europe, became even more open in the New World. He was not prepared for the narrow sectarian restrictions that his presbytery placed upon him: to minister to and serve communion to Seceder Presbyterians only. He was soon under their judgement for behaving otherwise.

The minutes of the presbytery, which tell the story of his trial, reveal that there was eventually more involved than his liberal practices as a preacher on horseback. It was not simply that he had ecumenical tendencies, but that he had serious misgiving about the theology of his church. Seven charges were brought against him, and these were debated in various hearings for two years, but about mid-way through the dispute Mr. Campbell withdrew from the presbytery and left the Presbyterian ministry, becoming an independent. The charges had to do with his opposition to creeds as terms of communion, his sympathy for the lay ministry, his desire to fellowship other churches, his idea that men can preach without being called, and his belief that a believer can live in this world without sinning. He more or less admitted guilt to all of these except the last one, and argued with his peers on scriptural grounds. The presbytery suspended him. He appealed to the Synod in Philadelphia, which was a higher court. After a week or so of hearings his suspension was rescinded, but he was rebuked for his aberrations. The presbytery resented his reinstatement and it was apparent that they were out to get him, first by giving him no appointments, and finally by suspending him again, this time for not submitting to their authority. But by this time he was already out on his own anyway.

The break with the Presbyterian Church was complete. As a final act of protest he returned to them the \$50.00 they gave him upon his arrival in America. By the time the presbytery deposed him from "the office of Holy Ministry" he had already written the *Declaration and Address* and had organized the Christian Association of Washington. The association was to help "unite the Christians in all the sects," and it was not to be another church. He hoped that many such societies would arise across the land, dedicated to the task of reforming the church and restoring its unity. The document was its Magna Charta and its slogan was "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak:

where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” Thomas had it with him in galley proofs when he met his son Alexander and the family on a road in western Pennsylvania, October 19, 1809, 20 days after their arrival in New York, following 54 days on the high seas. Now that they had had similar confrontations with sectarianism, which left them both “free agents” of the Lord, and now had their principles of reform worked out in that memorable document, they were now ready to be further honed for the launching of a unity movement.

And this is what was distinctive about the *Declaration and Address*. It called for reform through unity. This is what made the Campbell-Stone movement unique; it pled for a unity of all believers as well as a restoration of the primitive faith. The idea of restoration goes far back into efforts of reform, whether to Glas and Sandeman, the Haldanes, or the Anabaptists. But restoration *and* unity awaited the Restoration Movement in this country.

Thomas’ great document set forth *unity* principles. The church, he insisted, is by its very nature one, and cannot help but be one, if it be God’s church. Nothing can be made the basis of unity except what is expressly taught by Christ and his apostles. Nothing can be made a term of communion that is not as old as the New Testament. Inferences from scripture may be true doctrine, but they cannot be made binding upon others further than they perceive them to be so. Doctrinal systems may have value, but they cannot be made essential to the faith since they are beyond the understanding of many. Full knowledge of the Bible is not necessary to fellowship, and no one should be required to make a profession more extensive than his understanding. Division by its very nature is sinful. Opinions cannot be made tests of fellowship. The primitive faith as revealed in the New Testament should determine the ordinances of the church, not the creeds of men.

The Christian Association of Washington eventually became a congregation in spite of its original intention. The Brush Run church, as it was called, tried to work within a denominational framework. It applied for membership in a Presbyterian presbytery that Thomas thought would be friendly and was turned down. Once it became “baptist” in that it was now immersed, it joined a Baptist association, which did not work out. Then it joined another Baptist association. That one it converted! That is, that Baptist association gradually evolved into the Campbell wing of the Movement (the Stone movement had begun down in Kentucky a few years earlier).

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## Chapter 3

# The Spirit of the “Declaration and Address”

*Leroy Garrett*

Before we move into a consideration of Thomas Campbell’s lengthy *Declaration and Address*, in which he sets forth the principles that gave rise to the Restoration Movement, it is appropriate that we observe the spirit in which the document was written. We have reference to the attitude that Mr. Campbell had toward the problems that faced the church of his day, which are similar to those that we confront, and the attitude he showed toward others, specially those who differed with him.

The disposition that created the document is especially evident in the appendix to the document. The appendix itself is 60 pages, longer than the document proper. It is here that we can see Campbell coming to terms with some of the questions growing out of his mandate for renewal, the *Declaration and Address*. Principles can be obscure and impractical even when valid. They need illustration and explanation, and they especially need to be related to the problems faced by those at the grass roots level. In the appendix Campbell does this, reflecting the spirit that was to characterize the earlier stages of our Movement. This is why the appendix should have been the introduction and placed at the beginning rather than at the end.

## Other Churches

At the very outset Mr. Campbell expressed concern that the Movement he had begun among the churches might be misunderstood. He made it clear that his purpose was to restore peace and unity, not to attack and destroy the existing churches. “We beg leave to assure our brethren,” he wrote, “that we have no intention to interfere, either directly or indirectly, with the peace and order of the settled Churches.”

He further made it clear that he had no intention of causing people to leave the established churches to join his Movement. Even though the ministers may teach things with which he disagreed, he observed, this would not cause him to discourage people from hearing them. He wanted it to be said of his efforts “They seek not *yours* but *you*,” and so long as this spirit prevailed the existing churches would have nothing to fear from his labor of love.

While this intention on Campbell’s part was a noble one, it was hardly realistic. He had himself left the Presbyterians after some stormy experiences, and those who helped him start the Christian Association of Washington had also deserted their churches. Theoretically, the pioneers could have worked for unity and restoration *within* the churches, flatly refusing to start any other religious community; but practically this was hardly possible. Certainly they were not likely to influence others to stay with the churches and work for restoration within the traditional structures when they themselves had not done this.

In only a few years tens of thousands had joined the Campbells, with most of them coming from the established churches. It is academic to linger with the question of whether it could have been otherwise. What is important here is that the Campbells did have an irenic spirit toward the churches. They would have preferred to restore to the existing churches their view of the ancient order of things rather than starting afresh, but this could hardly be, especially since the clergy reacted so negatively to their effort.

## Creeds

It may surprise some of us, in view of our opposition to creeds through the years, that Mr. Campbell did not object to a creed *per se*. If a creed is no more than a statement of faith, a confession of one's belief, or a defense of his doctrine, there can be no objection. It is when the creed is used as a means of judging others or as a test of fellowship that it is evil in Campbell's view. It is the *abuse* of the creed that he opposed. Creeds are used to form new parties, he pointed out, and to divide the church.

Campbell believed that the basic fallacy of a creed, especially when used as a test of fellowship, is that it assumes that all God's children are of the same mentality and at the same level of understanding in regard to doctrines difficult to interpret. It is a serious sin, he believed, to bar people from the Christian community because they cannot accept what is beyond their apprehension. A "very high degree of doctrinal information" and "very clear and decisive judgment" were required to satisfy the demands of the creeds, he observed.

This is where they are wrong, he insisted, in that they draw the line of fellowship when the Bible does not. If a creed would not do this and was but a statement of "the great system of Divine truths and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors," he would have no objection. In fact, he would see this as beneficial.

## Opinions

From the very outset of the Restoration Movement in this country it was the problem of opinions that demanded so much attention, and it still appears to be a stumbling block in our own efforts to complete the work of the pioneers. Mr. Campbell wrote more about this question in the *Declaration and Address* than any other.

But the thesis was clearly stated from the beginning: *private opinions are not to be made the basis of Christian communion*. It was readily conceded that there would be differences of opinion in interpreting the scriptures, and this would not be discouraged. Opinions were private property, and a man was entitled to as many as he desired. But he was not to make his opinion a test of fellowship or make his own interpretations a means of judging others.

As Mr. Campbell put it: "We dare not, therefore, patronize the rejection of God's dear children, because they may not be able to see alike in matters of human inference – of private opinion."

He included himself in this judgment of opinion: "Thus we conclude to make no conclusion of our own, nor of any other fallible fellow creature, a rule of faith or duty to our brother."

The spirit of the Movement, according to Campbell, was to be friendly persuasion. He would plead for unity among the churches; he would call for a restoration of the primitive faith; but he would not presume to dictate to the churches what they should do. “We have only proposed what appeared to *us* most likely to promote the desired event,” he explained, “humbly submitting the whole premises to their candid and impartial investigation, to be altered, corrected, and amended, as they see cause, or to adopt any other plan that may appear more just and unexceptionable.”

This is the language of a man of peace, a conciliatory soul who wants to lead, not drive. We can only regret that this humble approach to religious problems, one that is as eager to learn from others as it is to teach, has not been more characteristic of our Movement.

He sought to correct what he called “a great evil” in reference to human opinion, namely, “the judging and rejecting of each other in matters wherein the Lord hath not judged.” It is in this context that he sets forth a principle that is most relevant to our time, a time when the church is fractured by the futile habit of making human opinions into divine law. Here is the statement that should appear repeatedly in all our brotherhood journals.

*No man has a right to judge his brother except insofar as he manifestly violates the express letter of the law.*

Campbell drives home this point, insisting that we have no right to take offense at a brother’s opinions so long as he holds them as such. If he does usurp the place of the lawgiver and makes his opinions into laws for others, we judge him even then, not for his opinions, but for his presumption.

He was convinced that troubles in the church have arisen over paying attention to opinions that should have been ignored. “The constant insisting upon them, as articles of faith and terms of salvation, have so beaten them into the minds of men, that, in many instances, they would as soon deny the Bible itself as give up one of those opinions.”

Somehow the heirs of the Restoration Movement failed to learn this lesson, our many divisions serving as monuments to that failure. That men will and should have opinions is evident enough, but that they would impose these upon others as matters of faith, thus rending asunder both homes and churches and causing untold misery, is surely one of the great wrongs of our time.

But a roll call of those opinions – instrumental music, the manner of serving the Supper, millennial theories, missionary methods, cooperative programs, to name only a few – bear witness to Campbell’s wisdom. We divide and sub-divide, all over opinions. If they could have been ignored and not insisted upon either way, *for* them or *against* them, we might now be a united people. Premillennialism is an illustration of what so often happens. If those who believed it had set it forth as their own interpretation, which for the most part was the case, and if the others of us had allowed them to hold such opinions without reprisal, it would never have divided us. But somebody had to make a big deal out of *opposing* it, insisting that his opinions to the contrary be the accepted norm. It was a case of negative law-making. You *cannot* be a pre-millennialist and be within the fellowship!

## Nature of Unity

Campbell made it clear that he had no illusions about everybody seeing the Bible alike. He described it as “morally impossible” that men should have identical views about divinely-revealed truths. The oneness he pled for, he insisted, was not a “unity of sentiment,” but a oneness with a diversity of opinion that calls for mutual sympathy and forbearance. He observes that uniformity of doctrine, in those instances where it has been achieved for a time, has made no lasting contribution to unity. Even creeds, designed to achieve uniformity, have done nothing for the unity of Christians.

In response to the criticism that his position is too liberal or latitudinarian, Mr. Campbell acknowledged that it is surely God’s intention that His people be of one heart and one mind and that there be substantial unity of sentiment. But it is unrealistic to expect perfection along these lines, for there will always be errors in the church. As he puts it: “We only take it for granted that such a state of perfection is neither intended nor attainable in this world, as will free the Church from all those weaknesses, mistakes, and mismanagements from which she will be completely exempted in heaven.”

He places the question of unity directly before his readers: “*What shall we do, then, to heal our divisions?*”

To continue in the present practice is to perpetuate the divisions forever. His answer to the question is what our people have long proclaimed to the religious world: “Profess, inculcate, and practice neither more nor less, neither anything else nor otherwise than the Divine word expressly declares respecting the entire subject of faith and duty, and simply to rest in that, as the expression of our faith and rule of our practice.”

If the churches will but have a “Thus saith the Lord” for all they believe and practice, he avowed, then unity can be a reality. This is being neither broad nor narrow, but only doing as the Lord subscribes. To walk by any other rule is to accept human authority, which is the cause of all the divisions.

This is the language with which most of us are familiar. The message is clear and unmistakable. If men will simply take the Bible, nothing more nor less, and be directed by what it expressly enjoins, and only that, we can heal our divisions.

Over a century and a half has passed since Mr. Campbell set forth these ideas, and while a great and noble people has arisen from his labors, the annoying fact remains that even his own followers are divided into a score of factions. His answer to the problem of division has solved nothing – neither in Christendom at large or in his own Movement.

Mr. Campbell’s answer is too simple or it is simply wrong. He says, for instance: “They will all profess and practice the same thing, for the *Bible exhibits but one and the self-same thing to all.*” How can we say this in the light of centuries of history? The simple truth is that good, honest, sincere men see the Bible differently, with or without creeds.

Yet the embryo for a workable solution is present in the *Declaration and Address*, and it was left for Mr. Campbell's son, Alexander Campbell, to set forth a more workable solution. Mr. Campbell recognized that men are at different stages of maturity, that they are constitutionally different, and that it is "morally impossible" for them to see everything alike. Yet he supposed that men *can* see alike what the Bible *expressly* says. That is, the *facts* can be understood by all alike. But this too has its difficulty, for just how are the facts to be separated from the rest?

### **Gospel and Doctrine**

Mr. Campbell needed to be aware of a distinction that was finally discovered by his son. If he had said that *the gospel of Christ*, as revealed in the Bible, can be believed and obeyed by all, leaving room for varieties of opinions and interpretations in regard to *the doctrine of the apostles*, his position would have been less vulnerable.

There is no cause for opinion or differences respecting *the fact of Christ*. The gospel is a proclamation of good news that one accepts or rejects. It was "the thing preached" long before there were any New Testament scriptures. This led Alexander Campbell to refer to a belief in the one *fact* (Christ is Lord) and a submission to the one *act* (baptism) as the basis of unity. His father was struggling for such clarity, but lacked insight into the difference between *gospel* and *doctrine*.

Never in this world will men be able to see alike all that is in the New Testament scriptures, nor is there any evidence that such was ever intended by God. Men were one in Christ, they were united and enjoyed fellowship with the Spirit, well before the New Testament scriptures were composed. This being true, those scriptures cannot be the basis for unity. It is the Christ revealed in those scriptures that is the basis of unity. When men believe in Him and obey Him in baptism they are one.

This is to say that the gospel is *not* the whole of the New Testament scriptures, for the gospel was a reality long before the scriptures were written. Strictly speaking, the teachings of the apostles are *not facts*, as the gospel is, but interpretations, implications, and edification based on the gospel. In this area, that of the *didache* (teaching) even the apostles differed in their ideas and emphases. The churches for whom these documents were written were likewise different from each other.

In all such areas as the worship of the corporate body, the organization of the congregation, personal and congregational problems there is room for different interpretations, which are evident in the scriptures themselves. Paul and Peter were as different as Jerusalem and Antioch. But whether Paul or Peter, Jerusalem or Antioch, there was unity, for they were all one in Christ. The gospel made them one. The *doctrine*, which was still being created, was and always will be subject to differences.

The *doctrine* allows for debate and dialogue, for intellectual stimulation and the stretching of the mind. It nurtures us in Christ, but in such a way that each man develops according to his own uniqueness. The pragmatic mind as well as the speculative mind finds food for thought. Its design is to make us all alike in our thinking, but to make us mature in Christ. The gospel is not of this nature, for it is the glorious revelation of heaven in the form of a Person that has inducted us into fellowship with God and with each other. Growth follows this induction, its source being the apostles' teaching.

Differences regarding doctrine may at times place a strain upon fellowship, but it is a tragic error to suppose that unanimity of doctrine is the basis of fellowship. If we wait for all of us to see all the scriptures alike before we are united, we will still be divided when the Lord comes.

Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* sets the tone for sensible dialogue, and, as we shall see in further installments, it postulates principles that are relevant to our day. In this installment, we have seen his sincere struggle for answers to almost impossible problems, his attitude toward creeds and opinions, as well as his treatment of those whose ideas he opposed.

All this we find not only exemplary, but worthy of building upon. After 160 years we should be well in advance of the point reached by Thomas Campbell. That we instead find ourselves yet behind is a serious indictment against our own sectarianism.

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## Chapter 4

# Principles of the Document

*Leroy Garrett*

The verbosity of the Address section, where some paragraphs run for several pages, subjects the document to the risk of not selling for what it is worth. It is therefore helpful to provide some outline to the ideas set forth, such as follows, which faithfully summarizes the thought, as the quotations will indicate.

*1. Division is terribly sinful, obstructing the mission of the church.*

He refers to divisions within the church as sad, evil, awful, woeful and accursed. The party spirit breaks up churches and neighborhoods alike, and as for unevangelized areas they “remain to this day entirely destitute of a Gospel ministry, many of them in little better than a state of heathenism, the Churches being either so weakened with divisions that they cannot send ministers, or the people so divided among themselves that they will not receive them.” At length he scores the evil of partyism, such as: “What awful and distressing effects those sad divisions produced! what aversions, what reproaches, what backbitings, what evil surmisings, what angry contentions, what enmities, what excommunications, and even persecution!!!”

*2. It is the responsibility of Christians to be more sensitive to the divisions within the church and do something about them, however insurmountable the task may appear.*

“Is it not then your incumbent duty to endeavor, by all scriptural means, to have these evils remedied,” he writes, and then adds this special word to the clergy: “And does it not peculiarly belong to *you*, who occupy the place of Gospel ministers, to be leaders in this laudable undertaking? Much depends upon *your* hearty concurrence and zealous endeavors.” He criticizes those that are complacent in the face of the urgency for unity, those who think the task too difficult, or who argue that the time is not ripe. The prayers of Christ and the church both in heaven and on earth are with those that make the effort to unify the church, and so “We judge it our duty to make the attempt, by using all due means in our power to promote it.” And he asks why it should be thought incredible that the Church of Christ cannot resume its original unity, peace, and purity.

*3. Divisions, for the most part, are over matters of private opinion, not over the essentials.*

The churches are agreed, not only on the great doctrines of faith and holiness, but on the positive ordinances of the Gospel institution, “so that our differences, at most, are about the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist, that is, about matters of private opinion or human invention.”

*4. Christ is the only source of unity, his word the only terms.*

“You are all, dear brethren, equally included as the objects of our love and esteem. With you all we desire to unite in the bonds of an entire Christian unity – Christ alone being the head, the center, his

word the rule; an explicit belief of, and manifest conformity to it, in all things – the terms.” He points out that for the sake of unity neither can require more than this of the other.

*5. The call to unite the church is not unreasonable, the time is not unseasonable.*

“We hope, then, what we urge will neither be deemed an unreasonable nor an unseasonable undertaking. Why should it be thought unseasonable? Can any time be assigned, while things continue as they are, that would prove more favorable for such an attempt, or what could be supposed to make it so?” He recognizes that there will always be those in the church that will support its divisions, and that Satan will not be idle in preserving them. He observes that men do not hesitate to act when their secular interests are at stake.

*6. Since Jesus prayed for the unity of his church, it must follow that adequate means can be found. We can do it!*

“That such a thing, however, will be accomplished, one way or other, will not be questioned by any that allow themselves to believe the commands and prayers of our Lord Jesus will not utterly prove ineffective.... We believe then it is as practicable as it is eligible. Let us attempt it. ‘Up, and be doing, and the Lord will be with us.’ Shall we pray for a thing, and not strive to obtain it?!”

*7. Since we will be one in heaven, we must be one on earth.*

“There are no divisions in the grave, nor in that world which lies beyond it,” he says. “There our divisions must come to an end! We must all unite there! Would to God we could find in our hearts to put an end to our short-lived divisions here; that so we might leave a blessing behind us; even a happy and united Church.”

*8. We must begin to associate with each other and be less interested in our own party, or unity will never be achieved. United we shall prevail!*

The task of uniting the church cannot be done if we “run every man to his own house and consult only the interests of his own party.” He lays down a practical rule: “Until you associate, consult, and advise together, and in a friendly and Christian manner explore the subject, nothing can be done,” and so he lays on them “the obvious and important duty of association.” Again and again he states his willingness to unite with the Christians in all the sects. “United we shall prevail!” he assures them.

*9. With nations being ravaged by war, how can we remain a divided church?*

Here Campbell looks beyond his own new frontier to a world wracked by the Napoleonic wars, “these awful convulsions and revolutions that have dashed and are dashing to pieces the nations like a potter’s vessel.” He poses a sober question that could be asked of most generations of Americans: “Have not the remote vibrations of this dreadful shock been felt even by us, whom God has graciously placed at so great a distance?” Then he cries like a prophet to a dispassionate people: “Is it time for us to sit still in our corruptions and divisions when the Lord, by his word and providence, is so loudly and expressly calling us to repentance and reformation?”

10. *Our efforts for unity are but a humble beginning, so we solicit the helps of others, for the collective graces of the whole church will assure us success.*

He praises “that dear-bought liberty” that has set him free from “subjection to any authority but his own in matters of religion,” and because of this the Association is seeking to promote peace and unity, “the mite of our humble endeavors.” The propositions he sets forth, he allows, are but preliminary, and he seeks “the collective graces that are conferred upon the Church” so that what is sown in weakness will be raised in power. He sought the counsel and cooperation of all Christians, “however unhappily distinguished by party names,” in promoting “the unity, purity, and prosperity of his Church.” Again and again there is that urgency to his plea: “Come, then, dear brethren, we most humbly beseech you, cause your light to shine upon our weak beginnings, that we may see to work by it.”

He then sets forth, in a more orderly arrangement, thirteen propositions that form the heart of the *Declaration*, several of which are a repetition of the foregoing principles. The first proposition is probably the most quoted and most influential of any paragraph ever written in the Movement’s history:

That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

This has served as the basis of the Disciples’ theology of the church, *that the church by its very nature is one, and that it is a contradiction to speak of a divided church*. Unity is somehow there, as God’s gift, however hidden by partyism. Ronald Osborn, quoting this paragraph from Campbell, writes: “From the outset Disciples have emphasized the insight so often repeated in ecumenical circles today concerning the givenness of unity among all Christians,”<sup>1</sup> but Ralph Wilburn may express the thrust of Campbell’s proposition even more pointedly when he sees the unity of the church as “real but not adequately realized.”<sup>2</sup>

The point is sometimes made that “their” should be emphasized in “those in every place that profess *their* faith in Christ,” so as to recognize Campbell’s openness to diversity of doctrine in the united church. But it is not likely that he intended this, for he often italicized words he wanted to stress in the document and did not do so here. His recognition of unity in diversity is sufficiently stated without resorting to this device.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald E. Osborn, “The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,” in *The Reformation of Tradition, The Renewal of the Church*, Vol. 1, Edited by W. B. Blakemore, St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Wilburn, “The Unity We Seek” in *The Revival of the Churches, the Renewal of the Church*, Vol. 3, Edited by W. B. Blakemore, St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963, p. 345.

Thirty-five years later Thomas combined this line on the church's unity with his ever consuming theme, love, in a letter written from his son's home in Bethany: "The church of Christ upon earth is constitutionally and essentially one: therefore, the first relative duty of every member of it is to preserve this unity by loving each other as Christ has loved them."<sup>3</sup> Those combined principles, *The church is one, therefore love*, form the essence of Thomas Campbell's teaching.

(*The Stone-Campbell Movement*, by Leroy Garrett; College Press, P.O. Box 1132, Joplin, MO 64802. Used by permission.)

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Campbell, "Extract of A Letter," *Millennial Harbinger*, 1844, p. 104.

## Chapter 5

# Historic Notes on Our First Church

*Leroy Garrett*

The old Brush Run church, just across into Pennsylvania from Bethany, VA (now West Virginia), was not really our very first Church of Christ, even though it is often referred to as such. Barton Stone's Cane Ridge congregation down in Kentucky, and others of its kind, were a few years earlier. Then there were some Glasite or Sandemanian congregations in New England that came over from the Old World that took the name "Church of Christ," and these were earlier still. But insofar as the Campbell movement is concerned, Brush Run was the very first congregation, and it is in order for us to trace our thousands of congregations today back to that one. For this reason, a few historical notes about that first congregation might prove to be both interesting and provocative.

1. Those who started it did not really intend to start a church. Thomas Campbell, the guiding light of the fledgling movement, only intended that the Christian Association of Washington (PA) be a society that would work for peace and unity among all the churches, with its adherents remaining members of their own denominations. But it did not work out that way, and so the Brush Run church was organized on May 4, 1811.
2. It wore no name at all except the Brush Run church. It existed until about 1828, at which time it moved into Bethany. When a brick structure was erected, which still stands, the name engraved in stone above the door read "Church of Christ." In 1823 a second church was started, with 32 members from Brush Run being dismissed "to start a church of Christ," in nearby Wellsburg. These included Alexander Campbell and his wife Margaret, as well as youthful Selina Bakewell, who in just five more years was to be the second Mrs. Campbell. Campbell had immersed Selina and her mother in 1820.
3. From the very first Sunday it observed the Lord's Supper each first day. This was due to the influence of the Haldane churches in Scotland. Campbell believed that a church was not a true church if it did not break bread each first day.
4. At Brush Run's first service three members refused to break bread because they were unbaptized (the others had all been sprinkled), and so they asked Thomas Campbell to baptize them, which was by immersion. This is the famous "root baptism," as it came to be called, since Campbell did not himself get into the water, but knelt on a root while immersing. Their critics later were to poke fun at this. At this time Brush Run accepted "sprinkled" people as baptized, and the Campbells would not then rebaptize such ones. But it was understood that anyone not baptized at all would be baptized by immersion. The Campbells themselves were not immersed at this time.
5. From May 4, 1811, until June 12, 1812 there were only these three members of Brush Run that were immersed. On the June date both of the Campbells and their wives, along with three others at Brush Run, were immersed by a Baptist minister. At the next meeting of the church 13 more requested immersion, and others still

- later. Those not immersed soon dropped out. So, for the first 13 months our very first congregation was made up almost altogether of unimmersed members.
6. When the church was first formed Thomas Campbell required each member to respond to a creedal statement relative to the efficacy of Christ's death, which some did not pass and were refused membership. But the practice was dropped immediately after this.
  7. The church ordained at least one man to the ministry, and that was Alexander Campbell, on New Year's Day, 1812.
  8. The congregation had but one elder, and that was Thomas Campbell, and there were four deacons. Plurality of elders came later.
  9. The congregation did not or would not pay for its building! The builder that prepared it for them, a structure 18 by 36, had to file suit in order to get his money, which was two cents shy of 100.00, three years later. Once deserted, it was sold for a blacksmith shop; still later it served as a post office and then as a stable. Seventy-five years after it was built some Disciples with a sense of history recovered its remains, and they are now stored in Bethany, with the idea that one day the old structure might be restored. The site of the church is now fenced off and preserved as a picnic area, and it is often visited by pilgrims to "Campbell country."
  10. Brush Run was a member of the Redstone Baptist Association, but their acceptance into the organization was unusual since they resolved to accept no creed except the Bible. They gradually came to be tagged as "Reformers" and were viewed with suspicion. When Thomas Campbell, now moved to Pittsburgh (He was always moving!), tried to enter a second church into the association, he was refused. They figured one was enough! When the Wellsburg church started, which was in part a device to deliver Alexander from the wrath of his Redstone brethren, it joined still another Baptist Association, known as Mahoning, which proved to be friendly to his cause.

But Brush Run remained in the Redstone Baptist Association all its life and was always considered a Baptist church, even if somewhat different, and Alexander Campbell for all those years was considered a Baptist minister. And it is noteworthy that both the Campbells went out of their way to work with and be a part of some denominational structure.

So, was the first Church of Christ also a Baptist church? In these days of our radical exclusivism these questions growing out of our early history can be embarrassing. There are a few places here and there, in Texas at least, that could not "fellowship" Brush Run, and of course they could not even allow either of the Campbells to speak for them or to lead a prayer.

*(Restoration Review, Vol. 19, No. 1; Jan. 1977)*

## Chapter 6

# “Let Christian Unity be Our Polar Star”

*Leroy Garrett*

Barton W. Stone was born 200 years ago this Christmas Eve. It is appropriate that he be honored as an apostle of religious freedom and as a founding father of the Restoration Movement. In 1831 at Lexington, KY, he helped to effect union between “Disciples” and “Christians” that became the first major merger of churches in the American ecumenical movement, and uniting as it did those confluences in Virginia and Kentucky that were dedicated to the task of uniting the Christians in all the sects, thus placing all the heirs of the Restoration movement in his debt.

Born in Port Tobacco, Maryland, he and his seven brothers and one sister suffered through the trying years of the Revolutionary War. But he was able to get a good education for a youth of his time, studying at Guilford Academy, a one-man institution that was conducted by a graduate of a famous log cabin school that was later named Princeton University.

Though apparently inclined toward the clergy, he never seemed to square with the status quo. When ordained by the Presbyterians in 1798 he was asked if he accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith. “I do as far as I can see it consistent with the word of God,” was his sincere reply, prophetic of the theological upheaval that was to characterize his life. His first charge was to minister to two churches in rural Kentucky, Concord and Cane Ridge.

It was at Cane Ridge that the great revival took place that eventually changed the direction of Stone’s life. The American frontier was secularistic and atheistic, with interest in religion at a lower water mark. Even the church had largely imbibed the carnal spirit of the new world. The time was ripe for what is now known as the Great Awakening, beginning in New England with Jonathan Edwards and following the frontier west. On the eve of great revivals in his own area Stone observed: “Apathy in religious societies appeared everywhere to an alarming degree. Not only the power of religion had disappeared, but also the very form of it was waning fast away.”

The revivals served as an antidote for such apathy, for they were phenomenal in nature and so demonstrative of the power of the Holy Spirit that the rankest of sinners were led to repentance. What Stone saw “on the edge of a prairie” in Logan county, KY, “baffled description,” as he put it. At the preaching of the Word many fell to the ground as if dead, remaining there for hours. Then would come signs of life, with groans and piercing shrieks along with prayers for mercy. Even children spoke with eloquence and wisdom in declaring the wonderful works of God and the glorious mysteries of the gospel. “Their appeals were solemn, heart-penetrating, bold and free,” Stone testified. He believed it was of God, providentially ushered in for the purpose of reformation, even though there was much fanaticism associated with it that he rejected.

## The Cane Ridge Revival

The Cane Ridge revival took place in the summer of 1801, attracting 25,000 people. For five days and nights as many as seven preachers, representing several denominations, would address the multitudes at the same time at different parts of the camp, without confusion. Multitudes turned to the Lord. Stone described sinners responding to the gospel with various exercises known as the jerks, falling, dancing and laughing, and even barking. One infidel, a friend of Stone, approached him amidst such demonstration and reproached him for deceiving the people with such antics. Stone responded with a few gentle words, pitying the man for his implacability. At which point the man fell immediately as if dead, and rose no more until he had confessed the Lord.

We give this background so as to point out that it was out of such a Holy Spirit revival that the Restoration Movement in Kentucky was launched. It may appear odd to us now, a people known for our negative reaction to such experiences in the Spirit, that the Cane Ridge congregation, which may well be viewed as the first Church of Christ in America, began amidst a Holy Spirit revolution with such attending phenomena as jerks, shouts and faintings. It was in the heart of this revival that Stone stood in the Cane Ridge pulpit and urged Mark 16:16 upon the hearers.

Such goings-on did not set well with Presbyterian officialdom, so Stone found himself at variance with his presbytery. Desiring to be a free man in Christ, one with the liberty to pursue truth wherever it may lead, Stone decided to withdraw from the Transylvania presbytery and organize his own. The old presbytery sent a committee to counsel with him, hoping to save him for Presbyterianism, only to have him convert some of the committee to his position! Finally Stone is excluded from the synod, the next highest court in the Presbyterian judicatory, along with several other ministers who had joined him. They formed the Springfield Presbytery, which included the several churches ministered to by the preachers involved.

Stone and his followers rejected party names and sectarian creeds, adopting the name Christian; Stone believing this to be a divinely-appointed name for believers. Even so they saw that their own presbytery was prone to be sectarian in that it separated them from the body of Christ at large. So they drew up *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, in which they said, "We will that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."

The Stone group, now known throughout Kentucky simply as "Christians," continued to grow, with several new congregations being formed. While they had turned from sectarian names and creeds and accepted only the Bible as the rule of faith and practice, and were committed to the union of all believers, they had not yet become immersionists. Committed to the scriptures as they were, these former Presbyterian preachers resolved that they should be immersed. The Baptists were unwilling to immerse them unless they resolved to become Baptists, so they proceeded to immerse each other. They did not, however, think of baptism in reference to remission of sins until some years later when Alexander Campbell entered the scene. Stone was later to recall how in these early years he had made periodic reference to Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16, but that the full import of such scriptures awaited the influence of Campbell.

The Stone wing of the Movement was, therefore, some 20 years older than Campbell's. When Stone and his fellow Presbyterian ministers were working their way out of the morass of sectarianism in

Kentucky, Alexander Campbell was still a teenager back in Ireland. By 1809, the year Campbell arrived in this country, the Stone movement was well underway, and another 15 years were to pass before Campbell and Stone were to meet. These facts should help to correct a common misunderstanding, which is that the Restoration Movement began with Alexander Campbell.

But once the electrifying influence of Campbell began to spread, the Stonites (known as “Christians”) and Campbellites (known as Reformed Baptists or Disciples) began to recognize that they had a great deal in common and that they should be one people. John T. Johnson, a congressman before he became an evangelist under the influence of Campbell (finally baptizing 10,000 souls!), was a neighbor to Barton Stone in Georgetown, KY, and it was through the passion that these men had for the oneness of the church that the Restoration Movement was united.

### **The Movement Unites**

Preliminary discussions were conducted in Georgetown between a small group of leaders from both groups. But it was over the Christmas holidays of 1831 in Lexington that the union was finally consummated. Besides Johnson and Stone, the other leaders in the union included Raccoon John Smith, John Rogers, and John A Gano. Consolidation of the union was assured by John Rogers, from the Stone churches, and Raccoon John Smith, from the Campbell churches, being appointed to visit together among the congregations so as to encourage fellowship. The union was further symbolized by Johnson and Stone serving as co-editors of the *Christian Messenger*.

Probably no man in our history has been as dedicated to the cause of unity as Barton Stone. Division to him was a grievous and inexcusable sin. When he moved from Georgetown to Jacksonville, IL, he found the Movement divided into a Stoneite church and a Campbellite church, the groups indifferent to what had happened at Lexington a few years before. He would not identify with either of them until they became one congregation, which they did. If more of our leaders through the years had demonstrated this kind of intolerance to the idiocy of factionalism, we might well have avoided the many divisions that have occurred in our ranks.

It is ironic that a Movement that began as an effort to unite the Christians in all the sects should itself become the most divisive of any persuasion in Christendom. It would be like Quakers evolving into bitter warmongers or like Pentecostals becoming apathetic to the call to holiness. Not only did our pioneers preach unity, they also practiced it. The union effected at Lexington could only have occurred among people who were prepared to accept each other despite differences and to honor the right of private judgment.

The Stoneites saw the Campbell groups as woefully negligent of the work of the Holy Spirit and as too legalistic on baptism, Stone complaining as he did that many of the Campbell people would not accept disciples as Christians unless they are aware of being immersed for the remission of sins. Too Campbell’s coolness toward the name Christian, believing it was but a term of derision applied to disciples by pagans, disturbed Stone no little.

The Campbell wing, on the other hand, saw the Stone folk as far too speculative, and much too enamored with such theological questions as the incarnation and the atonement. And Campbell and Stone even found time to do some debating on these issues. Too, the Campbellites were far too rationalistic for the Stoneites, while the Stoneites were too “heartfelt” for the Campbellites.

They had reasons enough to remain separated, and surely their differences were greater than many of those that keep the Movement divided today. The point is that they loved one another, a love that transcended the differences, a love that binds everything together in perfect harmony, as the apostle Paul puts it. Too, they realized that only a united church can lead the world to Christ, and they believed that their two groups shared in common those principles upon which the body of Christ could preserve the unity of the Spirit.

The magnanimity of Barton Stone had a lot to do with making the union possible. He was 16 years older than Campbell, and it was he, not Campbell, that had launched the movement to restore New Testament Christianity. Had he loved being the champion of a party more than he desired the oneness of Christ's body, he easily could have obstructed the rise of Campbell and taken those steps to preserve his own imminence. Many a leader since Stone has created or preserved a party for the sake of self-aggrandizement. But like John the Baptist looked upon the Christ, Stone saw in Campbell the leader that the Movement needed, and he was willing to decrease so that Campbell and the work of the reformation might increase.

"I will not say there are no faults in brother Campbell," wrote Stone in his autobiography, "but that there are fewer, perhaps, in him, than any man I know on earth; and over those few my love would throw a veil and hide them from view forever." He graciously adds: "I am constrained and willingly constrained to acknowledge him the greatest promoter of this reformation of any man living. The Lord reward him!"

*He is greater than I!* It is rare for one leader to say that about another, but then it is rare for party men to surrender their parties and seek the union that is in the Christ.

Campbell reciprocated by showing love and tenderness toward Stone, even amidst their controversies. When Stone entertained what Campbell saw as injurious opinions about the pre-existence of Christ, he would write to Stone, insisting that he was "*Brother Stone*" and was accepted and loved as a brother since he looked to Jesus as the Lord of his life, whatever his view of the incarnation.

Stone and Campbell were able to effect a union because they both accepted the premise that personal opinions cannot be made the basis of fellowship. They insisted that the ground of fellowship is belief in the one grand proposition that Jesus is Lord and obedience to that one institution, immersion.

Stone was indeed the forerunner in our current efforts to unite the Restoration Movement. Once the Union was realized in 1831 in Lexington, he expressed the hope that the Movement would never again divide. How his brave old heart would be grieved to know that since his time we have divided umpteen different ways. Unlike Stone who would not rest when he moved into a town and found two Restoration churches, we are complacent as we reside in communities with six or eight different kinds of our congregations, none in fellowship with the others. The concerned and passionate soul of Barton W. Stone should be the conscience of us all as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of his birth.

“This union I view as the noblest act of my life,” he said of the miracle at Lexington. May the mantle of his love for the unity of the body fall upon us today. Let us too realize that there is no work nobler than being a peacemaker in the divided ranks of God’s people.

“Let Christian unity be our polar star,” was Barton Stone’s constant cry. It was the rule and passion of his own life. And it reflects the right attitude toward unity, that it is a means to a much larger end rather than an end itself. Jesus prayed that the disciples would be one *so that the world will believe*. This is the glorious end of the union of believers, that the world will be led to the Christ. An ecumenicity that is an end in itself can only produce a vacuous institutional union, a super-church of some sort. Oneness of faith does not call for a conformity to a single super-church or an identity to some rigid doctrinal pattern. Congregations may well remain diverse, whether cultural or doctrinal, and still be one together in the Lord, accepting and loving each other as fellow heirs of the promises.

Mariners watch the polar star for guidance to the goal in view. Stone saw that unity of believers is the road by which we reach the heart of an unbelieving world. A divided church contradicts the very message of love it proclaims. But when the world sees that believers love each other even when they do not agree, it is impressed. Jesus assures us that men will be convinced that we are disciples when they see our love for one another. This is our polar star.

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## Chapter 7

# The Noblest Act in Barton Stone's Life

*Leroy Garrett*

When it comes right down to it, most of us would be at a loss in pointing to the noblest thing we've ever done. The idea might prove to be a suitable entree to some profitable soul-searching. We might conclude that our more remarkable accomplishments, such as making a lot of money or earning a high degree from a great university or getting a family reared and educated, may not be all that noble after all. One might be successful without being noble. Nobility of behavior points to something far beyond the self-serving things that consume most of our lives.

But it was no problem to Barton Stone. As he grew older he looked back on 1832 as the greatest year of his life, for something happened that year that not only changed his own life, but changed the course of the Restoration Movement in this country. By 1841 he was stricken with paralysis. With only three more years to live he began to pen some biographical notes. Looking back to that event in Lexington, KY, when the "Christians" of the Stone movement and the "Reformers" of the Campbell movement became a united force for the oneness of Christ's church, he wrote: "This union I view as the noblest act of my life."

Stone not only founded our Movement at old Cane Ridge back in 1804, while Alexander Campbell was yet a 16-year old lad back in Ireland, but he also united the Movement at Lexington in 1832, while Campbell was doing other things up in Bethany. Neither event was all that sudden or all that simple, but it was Stone's concern for renewal that gave the movement its birth in the revival fires of Cane Ridge, and it was his passion for unity that gave cohesion to two concurrent reformation efforts, influences that might otherwise have spent themselves into oblivion. That the "Stoneites" and "Campbellites" could ever get together as they did is a lesson of unity in diversity that we, their heirs, have too soon forgotten, if indeed we ever really learned it.

Stone's passion for the unity of God's people may well be the most dramatic fact in our exciting history. He was the right man with the right idea at the right time. He saw unity as the very essence of the Christian faith. This is why the Christ gave up heaven and took upon himself earthly poverty, to make men one in the Father. The purpose of the gospel is to make men brothers, not to divide them into warring sects. Some years after his death, John Rogers said of him: "He hailed with enthusiastic joy the least indications of a growing spirit of forbearance and brotherly love among the different denominations. For in the universal prevalence of the spirit of union among Christians, he saw the monster, sin, dethroned and the world converted."

This conviction gave birth to one of the great mottoes of our Movement: "Let Christian unity be our polar star." It is most insightful in that it recognizes that unity is more of a means in God's plan than as an end in itself. This is the point of our Lord's prayer for the oneness of his disciples. They were to be one *so that the world will believe*. Stone recognized that a divided church could never win a lost world. The union of believers, their love for each other as brothers and sisters, will guide us in the mission we have as God's church: to manifest to a sin-cursed world the love of Jesus.

He makes one point about the sin of division that is especially noteworthy, (and this is a characteristic of the founders of our movement: *they rediscovered the horrid sin of partyism*), and that is that its real cause is pride. Party pride. Creedal pride. Institutional pride. The pride of being right and exclusive and superior. John Rogers describes Stone's last addresses on his last journey before going home. He told his people that the object of his life had been to unite the people of God, that he considered this the greatest work that man can do upon this earth. Says Rogers of the venerable saint: "He reminded them, that if they would promote the unity and purity of the church, they must be humble. That pride had been the bane of union in all ages. That under the influence of pride men become selfish, self-willed, ambitious, resolved to make to themselves a great name, to make a party and stand at the head of it." Stone emphasized the point that humility always tends to promote unity in that it disposes one to look after the happiness of others, while pride promotes us to esteem ourselves better than others.

There must have been something about Stone's bearing, that inner being that illumined his whole personality (Aristotle would call it **ethos**) that caused the party spirit to cringe in his presence. Something like a foulmouthed reviler controlling his tongue while in company with people so different from himself. When Stone moved to Jacksonville, Illinois a few years after the union in 1832, he found two congregations, one after the Campbell tradition and the other after Stone. His very presence seemed to have cohesive power. Partyism could only blush and be ashamed in the face of such a holy man. He would not join either one, nor would he rest in peace until they caught the spirit of Lexington. They soon became one congregation, working together in love, despite their differences.

### **He Saw Unity As God's Gift**

The difference between Stone and most of us who are the heirs of what he began is that he *really* believed that partyism is a sin against God and that Jesus' prayer for unity can be realized by his disciples if they truly want that prayer answered. He saw unity as God's gift to the church through His indwelling Holy Spirit. This can be ours *if we really want it*. But we today talk about how we have "restored the church to its pristine purity" and that we and we alone are "the New Testament church," and that the answer to division is for everybody else to line up with us. This is not the unity of the Spirit, nor was it the plea that gave zest to our Movement. It is rather an inane and arrogant demand for conformity. Stone would blush in the face of such trifle. The movements that he made into one, by turning men's hearts to the Spirit of God, was by no means predicated upon doctrinal agreement. In the face of substantial differences, some of which they never resolved, they became one congregation of Christ. They put into practice what reformers had been saying since Luther: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, love."

A brief outline of events leading up to the union of 1832 would be as follows:

1. In 1804, Stone and other Presbyterian preachers denounced all sectism, thus leaving the Presbyterian Church and becoming Christians only. Unable to find anyone to immerse them on simple biblical grounds, they baptized each other. They formed an independent prebytery, made up of some seven congregations, but this they soon dissolved, giving birth to *the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, in which they willed that their society should die and be swallowed up in the body of Christ at large. It is one of the great documents of our history.

2. From 1804 until the late 1820's this group, calling themselves simply Christians, grew slowly but substantially throughout Kentucky. They may have grown to as many as 10,000 by 1830. Barton Stone was the leader and he suffered much persecution from his Presbyterian friends because of his innovative movement. He was later to say, somewhat humorously, that he especially welcomed association with Alexander Campbell since he could take a lot of calumny that had been his alone to bear. They were often dubbed as "Stoneites".
3. At this time the "Christians" knew little or nothing of the "Reformers" that were associated with the Campbells. The Campbell movement began in 1809 in Pennsylvania and grew almost imperceptibly for the first 15 years, having only three or four congregations. We have seen that it was as part of the Mahoning Association of Baptist Churches in the Western Reserve (part of Ohio) and the evangelism of Walter Scott that the movement began to flower.
4. The Campbell movement grew very rapidly in the late 1820's, moving on down into Kentucky, and they probably numbered about 12,000 by 1830. They were mostly Baptists – "Reformed Baptists" – and they immersed thousands as they moved across the frontier, but they never re-immersed Baptists, As they grew stronger and bolder they were gradually "withdrawn from," as it were, by the regular Baptists, and so they found themselves a separate communion. They generally called themselves Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ.
5. It was now that the "Christians" and "Reformers" began to make contact with each other, for in some cases they would have congregations in the same frontier towns and cities. Stone now lived in Georgetown, Ky., as did John T. Johnson, who left Congress to become an evangelist among the Disciples, influenced as he was by Alexander Campbell, who had begun his forays into Kentucky in 1824. It was that year that Campbell and Stone first met. Raccoon John Smith, whose story we have recounted, also enters the picture at this point, becoming a "Reformed Baptist" under Campbell's influence. He too was a principal character in the union of the groups.
6. It was Stone and Johnson who put together the first "unity meeting" in our Movement's history there in Georgetown where they were neighbors. For four days their folk met together and resolved to become one people together in the Lord. That was over the Christmas holidays, 1831. A few days later, over the New Year's weekend, a larger and more extensive gathering was held in Lexington, and so they began the new year, 1832, as a united movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects."

It was this that they had most in common. A desire to make God's people one on the basis of the scriptures alone, apart from the creeds and opinions of men. Both groups were immersionists, but the "Christians" did not see baptism as being for the remission of sins, as did the "Reformers." With Stone religion was more "experimental" than it was with Campbell, and something akin to the mourner's bench continued to be common among them. Nor had Stone yet accepted a weekly serving of the Supper, as the Campbells had from the very first Lord's Day at old Brush Run (even before they accepted immersion), influenced as they were by the Scottish reformers in the world from which they had come.

But only two differences were monumental enough to threaten the proposed union. The Stone people feared the Campbellites had too much head religion and not enough heart, and they were strongly suspicious of their views on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Campbellites in return had serious misgivings about Stone's speculations about "the Trinity," especially in reference to the old Arian controversy on the pre-existence of Christ. They accused Stone of believing that the Christ was *a created being* and therefore not eternal with the Father. But it was his speculative and metaphysical turn of mind that most alarmed them, and they feared he would infiltrate the ranks with such opinions, the very thing they were seeking to escape.

It was here that Stone showed his magnanimity. Realizing that he had been too speculative in his handling of scripture, he resolved to cool it. He went on record as agreeing that there is but one thing necessary insofar as faith is concerned, for union in Christ, and that is believing that Jesus is the Son of God. And there is but one act that is required for entrance into the fellowship of the church, and that is immersion. Campbell had long stressed this *believing the one fact, obeying the one act* as the basis of fellowship, and Stone accepted it. Stone, however, never really believed in baptism as "essential to salvation," the view that eventually emerged among the Campbellites, though Campbell himself avoided stating the idea that strongly. Stone's definition of a Christian will interest you: "Whoever acknowledges the leading truths of Christianity, and conforms his life to that acknowledgement, we esteem a Christian."

It is appropriate to state here that the leaders of our movement, beginning with Stone and Campbell, have *never* been of the same interpretation in reference to baptism. It is also noteworthy that it was no "discovery of the truth about baptism" that launched the movement. The Campbells began out of concern for a divided church, and Alexander concedes that the doctrine of baptism for remission of sins came along 15 years later – and 12 years after his own immersion! Stone states that when he first met Campbell in 1824 only two differences appeared important to him: Campbell believed in baptism for remission of sins and "Weekly communion." He came to accept both, he says, albeit he never came to emphasize baptism as did Campbell. So his movement was also initiated by a desire for the union of all believers, apart from human names and creeds. Along the way, he was immersed out of obedience to Christ, but baptism never became the hallmark of the Movement in these early years.

We will leave it to the reader to decide whether either Barton Stone or Alexander Campbell, neither of whom was baptized for the remission of sins (as they saw it, at least) could be "fellowshipped" by their congregations in our day.

One can but admire the pragmatism that went along with the idealism that led to that union in Lexington. Stone invited John T. Johnson to join him as co-editor of the *Christian Messenger*, which served to symbolize the union. Raccoon John Smith not only wrote his "Address to the Brethren" in which he pled for forbearance of differences, but he joined John Rogers in riding horseback from congregation to congregation, uniting them in practice as well as in theory. It was a task masterfully accomplished, and it surely stands as the noblest chapter in our history. The movement really did become one, despite all its diversity. That is why Stone was able to effect the union of those two churches in Illinois that had not yet caught the message. *We Disciples are a united people working for the union of all God's church!* That was the message, and they all climbed aboard.

## Love and Forbearance

Love and forbearance were the rule by which they walked. Stone graciously stepped into the shadows when Campbell's star arose, acknowledging him as the leader of the Movement even though Campbell was younger and later on the scene. He assured his people that Campbell was a true man of God, one with fewer faults than any man he knew. Campbell in turn accepted Stone as his dear brother in the Lord, despite misgivings about his views on the nature of Christ's pre-existence.

A few years later, in his debate with Rice, Campbell leveled a few charges at speculative theologians, including some in his own Movement. He mentioned Dr. Thomas and Barton Stone in particular, stating that he did not approve of some of Stone's positions. It was something that he did not have to say. He soon got a letter from Kentucky, signed by 12 evangelists and elders, including John Rogers and J.A. Gano, expressing regret that such remarks about brother Stone were being published to the world, and graciously reprimanding him as if to say, *We Disciples are a united people and don't do those things. Remember?* Campbell did not contest their complaint.

In that letter to Campbell those twelve men penned a paragraph that must stand as among the greatest we have ever published: "It was not your joining brother Stone as a leader, nor his joining you as such; but all rallying in the spirit of gospel truth, liberty and love, around the one glorious center of attraction – Christ Jesus: thus out of two, making one New body, not Campbellites or Stoneites, but Christians; and so making peace. May it long continue to bless our land."

John Rogers was confident that the Movement would continue in the spirit of Lexington and never divide. No one "came over" to anybody's side. No one surrendered any truth. No one was even asked to give up any opinions he held, but only to make sure he held his opinions as private property and not make them tests of communion. They united upon the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" – the essentials. In non-essentials they resolved to leave each man free. In all things they practiced love and forbearance.

And so wrote John Rogers after describing the union of the two groups: "We trust in God that no such disaster as that of division shall ever befall us. Nor can it, if we are true to our cause." He went on to say that if the principles of unity as set forth by Campbell and Stone are adhered to the Movement will never divide, and it will go on "to be a great blessing to Christendom and to the world."

And so it was right on through the Civil War. While others divided, our people did not. This caused Moses E. Lard to write in his *Quarterly*, just after the bloody conflict, that the Restoration Movement would never divide now that it had endured that awful war as one people.

But John Rogers passed along to us the qualifying clause – *if we are true to our cause*. And there's the rub!

Stone and Campbell united on the basis of belief in the one fact (Jesus is the Christ) and obedience to the one act (immersion). Nothing else. Opinions, deductions, interpretations or speculations about scripture cannot be made tests of fellowship. We can differ about a lot of things and still be one.

We are now divided 15 or 20 different ways, and in doing so we have betrayed a sacred trust. John Rogers would shame us for forgetting the spirit of Georgetown and Lexington. Barton Stone would say that we have taken our eyes off the polar star and thus lost our direction. Campbell would say that we have missed the point of the Movement in that we make the distinctive features of our own sects the basis of union, the very thing the movement was trying to correct.

We might turn Roger's and Lard's prophecy about *not* dividing around and say that we will never again be united until we return to those grand old truths that gave birth to our Movement. "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love." And they spelled that out for us. There is no way to miss it. It is a question of whether we want what they wanted. They became one because they had a passion for unity, and because they believed the Lord's prayer for a united church could be realized in their lives and among their churches. When we have their passion and their faith, we too will find the way.

"It was the noblest act of my life," said the stricken and venerable Barton W. Stone, as he looked back over the years.

May God put into our hearts and into our churches to seek that same nobility in our lives. When it is all over for us, and we look back over the years, what shall we say about this, the grandest theme man can contemplate, the unity of God's people. What will we have done? How noble will it be?

(*Restoration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 7; Sept. 1976)

## Chapter 8

# Learning from a Backwoods Preacher

*Leroy Garrett*

When Raccoon John Smith stood up to speak at the union meeting in 1832, Lexington, Ky., between the “Christians” (Stone) and the Disciples or Reformers (Campbell), it may well have been the most dramatic moment in our history. While Alexander Campbell was not there, and less than enthusiastic about what was going on, Barton W. Stone was, and he gave his hearty blessings to the effort, along with numerous other leaders on both sides, especially John T. Johnston, who may be given credit for the significant event.

It says something for the individuality of the Movement that a union could be effected between two groups, who had rather substantial differences between them, without the blessings of its most eminent leader. But Campbell did not oppose it, only thought it premature, and in time gave the union his support.

It is the wisdom with which Raccoon spoke on the occasion that is the concern of this essay. His biographer assures us that Raccoon realized the sensitivity of his role as the chief spokesman. An intemperate word, and unfraternal glance, or the slightest sectarian gesture might have spoiled it all. He spoke on our Lord’s prayer for the unity of all believers, showing that oneness is both desirable and practical. Unity is between *believers*, he noted, not churches or sects, Jesus was not praying for an amalgamation of sects, but that there would be no sects at all. He observed that opinions and speculations, *when insisted upon as tests of fellowship*, have always caused divisions.

He showed how the church has argued over the doctrine of the atonement for centuries, and has divided over it, and that it is no closer together on the subject than when the dispute first began. He said he handled that issue by simply setting forth what the Bible actually says, such as “My Father is greater than I,” without speculating upon the inferiority of the Son. Or he would cite “Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God” without drawing opinions about the consubstantial nature of the father and Son. “I will not build theory on such texts and thus encourage a speculative and wrangling spirit among my brethren,” he told his Lexington audience.

This is the genius of that Movement that was started as an effort to unite the Christians in all the sects. Union among believers can be practically realized when opinions, which may be freely held *as opinions*, are not imposed upon others as tests of communion. Only what the Bible clearly and distinctly teaches can be required of all believers. As Raccoon laid it before the unity meeting: “Whatever opinions about these and similar subjects I may have reached, in the course of my investigations, if I never distract the church of God with them or seek to impose them on my brethren, they will never do the world any harm.”

He went on to identify the gospel as a system of facts, commands, and promises, and insisted that no deduction or inference drawn from them, however logical or true, forms any part of the gospel. Our opinions about the gospel are not part of the gospel and therefore cannot be held as a threat over those who deny them, he added.

He said he was willing to surrender any opinion for the sake of unity, but that he would not give up one fact, commandment, or promise of the gospel for the whole world. "While there is but one faith," he told them, "there may be a thousand opinions; and hence if Christians are ever to be one, they must be one in faith, and not in opinion."

It was then that he gave his famous exhortation: "Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites of Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us all come to the Bible, and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the Light we need."

### **A Handshake**

Stone then took Raccoon's hand, agreeing with him as to the basis of unity and fellowship, thus uniting two unity movements. They broke bread together the next day, symbolizing a oneness that was to endure for more than half a century. When division finally wracked the Stone-Campbell Movement it was because leaders with a different spirit had risen.

Raccoon was something else. He earned his nickname by having come from raccoon country in the boondocks of southern Kentucky. With no chance of formal schooling, he became literate the hard way, but eventually became a very well read man. Tragedy tempered his life curbing his pride and giving him a lovable sense of humor. But when his children burned to death in a log cabin fire, causing his wife to die of grief, he despaired of life itself. God lifted him up out of his extremity and made of him a gallant soldier of the cross. And a wise one. His spiritual wisdom united two churches, and we would do well to listen, we his heirs, who seem bent upon dividing churches, and then subdividing. Raccoon's heirs today are divided more than a dozen different ways. He would consider that both incredible and irresponsible. What have we learned from our own history?

Raccoon's plan was both simple and profound. On controversial issues, he would simply state what the Bible actually says. On *that* (what the scriptures actually say) we can all agree. He will draw no deductions of opinions, or if he does he will set them forth as opinions, and will not impose them as tests of fellowship. We can be united only in this way, he insisted, never on our deductions.

Suppose we applied this to the current dispute over whether tongue-speaking has ceased, as per 1 Cor. 13:10. Here is what the Bible actually *says*: "When the perfect is come that which is in part shall be done away." We can all agree that *that* is what the Bible says. But as to what the *perfect* means is a matter of opinion, our own deduction. So, we can remain united in mind by together accepting what is said, allowing freedom of opinion as to what is actually meant.

Then there are some that will draw the line on a sister or brother for taking a drink. I do not take drinks and I suppose I do not approve, but in the light of scripture do I have the right to impose my view upon others, demanding that they see it my way or be thrust from the fellowship? The scriptures clearly make drunkenness a sin, and I know of no one that disputes that. Here we can agree. But to deduce that one cannot therefore take a cocktail with his meals without sinning is to go beyond what the Bible says. The teetotaler may be right, but as Thomas Campbell liked to put it, he cannot impose his deduction upon others until they see it the way he does.

I am persuaded that virtually all of our disputes are of this character. We divide over what the Bible says nothing about or over an opinion as to what it means when it does speak. We must realize that there may be difference between what the Bible says and our interpretation of what it says. So a country preacher suggests a solution: *seek unity only on what the scriptures say and allow liberty of opinion as to what all it may mean by what it says.*

Perhaps that would not solve all our problems, but it would solve a lot of them. And it places fellowship where it belongs: squarely on the scriptures rather than our sectarian interpretations.

*(Restoration Review, Vol. 22, No. 1; Jan. 1980)*

## Chapter 9

# Christians in Babylon

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

Are there any Christians in the religious sects about us? This question occurs with increasing frequency in the letters we receive. It is our intention to face up to such questions regardless of personal consequences. Only by doing so can we live with ourselves and be true to the trust He has imposed upon us. Only by this method can we serve our generation before we fall asleep. Truth must be our chief consideration so I unhesitatingly state that I believe the sheep of God are a scattered flock and that God has a people in Babylon. I am convinced that there are many Christians among the sectarian parties of our day.

Mind you, I do not believe that there are any Christians outside the body of Christ. Every Christian on earth has been added to the church of God. A Christian is one who is in Christ and it is impossible to be in Christ and not be a member of his body. All who have been immersed upon the basis of their faith in Christ Jesus are in Christ. "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

The children of God are divided. Christians are separated from one another. This is the real tragedy. We should not think it strange that the children of the devil are divided. It would be peculiar if they were united. But it is indeed sad that Christians are not together, seeing that "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." Our constant aim should be to help bring all of the sons of God into a state of togetherness. We cannot accomplish this by denying that they are sons of God. Neither can we do it by creating another sect more exclusive and intolerant than those in which they are already involved.

It is only when we recognize our brethren and love them as brethren that we can move toward a closer association with each other and a closer walk with God. We cannot unite the family by denying the paternity of those who compose it. This was clearly understood at the outset of the restoration movement of which most of our readers are the heirs. Alexander Campbell described it as "a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects." We have lived to see the day when the parties resulting from this project, or from abuses of it, regard as "heresy" the mere intimation that there are any Christians in the sects. This is a complete reversal of thought. What has happened?

There is really no easy answer to be given for a number of complex factors have combined to provide the present attitude. We represent about the fifth generation of those who launched the noble experiment. All of us were born into an age when the party spirit had crystallized. We found a well-entrenched organization already on the scene operating under the official title "Church of Christ" or "Christian Church." That organization grew up almost in self-defense when the early restorationists were driven forth from the sectarian groups which spewed out the leaven of their testimony. At the outset there was no separate group existing under the label "Church of Christ" and had not been for centuries. It was a good many decades before there was such an organization.

Those who are presently members of one of the twenty-five factions denominating themselves “The Church of Christ” are generally good people. They are not inclined by nature to be vindictive or hateful. But they have been conditioned to believe that the particular “Church of Christ” with which they are affiliated is identical with the church of God mentioned in the new covenant scriptures. Since each faction has its own test of fellowship in an unwritten legalistic code or creed it is obvious that one who does not subscribe to it is not a child of God.

The members of “The Church of Christ” have been led to believe that they alone constitute the kingdom of heaven. They are the Israel of God, and all other believers in Christ are deceived and are not believers at all, but unbelievers. These are regarded as being “without hope and without God in the world” and are to be treated as heathen and pagans. It is only fair to say that among the more scholarly party leaders there is probably a revulsion of spirit against such a narrow and illiberal attitude but they dare not express themselves openly. They have contributed to the party spirit, and are now supported by it. It would be suicidal for them to try and breast the current which they have helped to create.

As an indication of how far adrift the restoration movement has gone we need only mention that the suggestion that there are Christians in the sects is now bitterly assailed as “new doctrine.” This expression is the kiss of death to any idea to which it is applied for it is unthinkable to admit that those who have long held the key of knowledge could learn anything else. An infallible interpretation dare admit no error! *Yet it is the view that there are no Christians among the sects that is new doctrine!* This is modernism gone to seed! Not one of the early restorationists of note held such an idea. If they had there would have been no restoration movement. The very purpose of the project was to unite Christians and there was no party called “Church of Christ.”

The men who began the restoration movement were in the sects – Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist parties. It is a fair question to ask at what date every Christian on earth deserted every sect and left none remaining where so many had been before? When did every disciple abandon all organizational error so that all who remained were not disciples but impostors? When did the restoration movement become the church of Christ? If we cannot answer these questions it might be challenging to contrast our modernistic viewpoint with that of some of the pioneers. We shall quote these men not to prove that there are Christians in the sects but to show that they thought there were. Thus our position is not new doctrine, but the opposing view is the novel one.

We quote first from the witnesses who signed “*The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*” on June 28, 1804. These men were Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, Richard McNemar, Barton W. Stone, John Thompson and David Purviance.

**“Let all Christians join with us, in crying to God day and night, to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of his work, and give him no rest till he make Jerusalem a praise in all the earth. We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name, in thanksgiving to God for the display of his goodness in the glorious work he is carrying on in our western country, which we hope will terminate in the universal spread of the gospel.”**

We quote next from the “*Declaration and Address*” which was presented to the members of the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, in September, 1809, by its author, Thomas Campbell.

**“Moreover, being aware from sad experience of the heinous nature and pernicious tendency of religious controversy among Christians; tired and sick of the bitter warrings and janglings of a party spirit, we would desire to be at rest; and were it possible, would also desire to adopt and recommend such measures as would give rest to our brethren throughout all the churches – as would restore unity, peace and purity to the whole church of God.”**

A good many years later, Thomas Campbell identified his “Christian brethren” and proved that he recognized them as existing under various partisan titles.

**“We speak to all our Christian brethren, however diversified by professional epithets, those accidental distinctions which have happily and unscripturally diversified the professing world. By our Christian brethren, then, we mean the very same description of character addressed in our Declaration published at Washington, Pa., in the year 1809 – namely, ‘All that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, throughout the churches.’ If there were none such at that time throughout the churches, then Christianity was dead and gone. And if there be none such at present within the same limits, it still continues extinct.”**

It was Alexander Campbell who definitely stated the goal of the restoration movement. The following appeared in the book *“Christianity Restored”* which was published at Bethany, Virginia, in 1835.

**“A deep and an abiding impression that the power, the consolations and joys – the holiness and happiness of Christ’s religion were lost in the forms and ceremonies, in the speculations and conjectures, in the feuds and bickerings of sects and schisms, originated a project many years ago for uniting the sects, or rather the Christians in all the sects, upon a clear and scriptural bond of union; upon having a ‘thus saith the Lord,’ either in express terms, or in approved precedent `for every article of faith, and item of religious practice.’ This was offered in the year 1809 in the ‘Declaration and Address’ of the Washington Association, Pennsylvania.”**

In 1862, Benjamin Franklin, who was editor of the *American Christian Review* stated his position very clearly:

**“There are individuals among the sects who are not sectarians, or who are more than sectarians – they are Christians; or persons who have believed the gospel, submitted to it, and in spite of the leaders, been constituted Christians according to the Scriptures.”**

In the same year, Brother Franklin made the following statement in his paper:

**“That there are many Christians among the sects, a people of God in Babylon, we have believed and admitted, and committed to print many years ago, and we believe the same now. That these have a right to commune, and enjoy in common with all Christians, all the blessings of the house of the Lord, we presume is not doubted by any brother.”**

Two years later, in his quarterly for March, 1864, Moses E. Lard while writing on the topic *“Have We Become a Sect?”* had this to say:

**“Against the individual members of these parties we cannot have even one unkind feeling. Many of them we regard as true Christians, and love them sincerely. But as they occupy a place in bodies holding traditional and other unsanctioned tenets; holding practices unknown to the Bible, and supporting humanly imposed names, we must tell them plainly that they stand on apostate ground.**

Frank G. Allen was editor and proprietor of *The Old Path Guide*, a monthly Journal “devoted to the restoration and defense of primitive Christianity.” In his issue of October, 1880, Brother Allen wrote thus:

**“We are not of those who believe that gruffness and discourtesy to those who differ from us religiously are synonyms of soundness. Inflexible fidelity to truth does not demand this. Nor do we think that anything is gained by magnifying the differences between us and others. The best interests of the cause we love demand that only the real differences shall be presented, not imaginary ones, and these in kindness and love. Our standard of right and wrong is not what the sects do, but what the Bible teaches. Nor have we any sympathy with the reimmersion of Baptist, or any other people, unless their faith was defective when first immersed. With these exceptions those who go forth to ‘baptize Baptists’ are working under a modern commission. The idea that all God’s children are found among those vulgarly called Campbellites is a false conception of our reformatory work, and the teaching of the word of God. It is natural for those holding this position to conclude that our plea for Christian union is not only useless, but senseless.**

David Lipscomb, who was editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, writing in his book *Questions Answered*, says on page 582:

**“There are some in sectarian churches who will obey God and follow him in spite of the churches in which they find themselves. As examples, there are persons in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches who are baptized to obey God rather than to please the sects. In this they rise above the party spirit, despite the parties in which they find themselves. They ought to get out of the sectarian churches, but they see so much sectarianism in the nonsectarian churches that they think they are all alike.”**

Daniel Sommer was editor of the *Octagraphic Review* and produced a booklet under the heading *Religious Sectism Defined, Analyzed and Exposed*. He expressed his sentiments in the language:

**“What shall we say of those preachers who denounce all persons who happen to hold membership in a sectarian denomination with a sentence of sweeping impeachment, as though they were all under the influence of sectism? We should say that they are probably more sectarian than some whom they denounce. Their manner shows that they are unscripturally exclusive, and this is one of the elements of sectarianism.”**

It can be seen by the foregoing that I occupy the same position as those other “liberals” and “modernists” of yesteryear – Campbell, Stone, Lard, Franklin, Allen, Lipscomb and Sommer. The charge that this position is a “new doctrine” is absurd and ridiculous. The fact is that “The Church of Christ” has become sectarian by adoption of its present position. It can only contribute to strife and division as long as that position is maintained. Let me make myself clear. I hold that every

sincere immersed believer in the Sonship of Jesus is God's child and my brother. That is true regardless of how much such believers are "diversified by professional epithets."

To demand that one of God's children be forced to submit to re-baptism at the hands of one of "our preachers" in order to be in "our fellowship" is sectarianism pure and simple. This is the very essence of the sectarian spirit. Such Church-of-Christ-ism like all other "isms" is an insult to the person and dignity of the Holy Spirit by whom we "are all baptized into one body." No one demonstrates loyalty to the Father by refusing to recognize his other children; no one manifests faithfulness to Christ Jesus by denying those whom the Son is not ashamed to call his brethren.

Make no mistake about it! Sectism is sinful. It is a work of the flesh, a symptom of carnality and a sign of spiritual immaturity. It is not hallowed because we practice it, nor purged from evil because we are guilty of it. Sin is no different when those who engage in it sit in a house labeled "Church of Christ" than it is when practiced under any other name. Not every person in a sect is sectarian. Sectarianism is the party spirit. It is an attitude toward truth. It is not so much *what* a man thinks as *how* he thinks; it is not so much *where* he is as *why* he is there! A man can be wrong on a doctrinal matter and not be sectarian. He can be in the Methodist Church and not be sectarian; he can be in the "Churches of Christ" and be sectarian.

We call upon all men to leave their sectarian spirit as they would flee from any other work of the flesh. We need to hate this garment spotted by the flesh! It is only those who are free from the bondage of sectism who can furnish the leadership to a better and brighter day! It is not "new doctrine" to love and cherish all of God's children; it is dangerous not to do so.

*(Mission Messenger, Vol. 23, No. 6; June 1961)*

## Chapter 10

# What is the Gospel?

*Leroy Garrett*

This question is more relevant than we might suppose, for it just may be that we have some serious misunderstandings about the nature of the gospel. Response from across the country to a recent letter of mine in the *Christian Chronicle* convinced me that we would all do well to re-think the question *What is the gospel?* I made such statements as “The gospel is in the scriptures, but not to be identified with them.” The responses made it clear that the common notion among our people is that the gospel is the whole of the *New Testament*. One is therefore preaching the gospel when he is expounding upon any biblical theme, rooted in the truths of the *New Testament*. My letter presented a different view from this.

There are severe implications to the position that the gospel consists in the teachings of the *New Testament*. If this is so, then for one to obey the gospel and become a Christian he must understand the whole of the New Covenant scriptures and obey them aright. If this is so, then fellowship among Christians, which is admitted by all to be based upon the gospel, is dependent on all of them seeing the Bible exactly alike. If this is so, then only he is a gospel preacher who preaches “the truth” on all the doctrines in the Christian scriptures. If this is so, then there was not a single apostle who preached the whole gospel, with the possible exception of John, for the *New Testament* was not completed until near the close of the first century. If this is so, the disciples in the primitive church heard only *part* of the gospel, for the scriptures were not complete until long after they passed on. If this is so, Paul could not have been right when he said, “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ,” for part of the *New Testament* was not written until long after his death.

But there is even a more serious implication. If the gospel, which God gave for the salvation of the world, is a composition of all the doctrines in the scriptures, then we are left with an ambiguous message to proclaim to a lost world. Many of the teachings of the *New Testament* are unclear and difficult. Peter himself says of Paul’s teachings: “There are some things in them hard to understand.” Is the gospel which we are to proclaim to men with broken hearts and disturbed minds *hard to understand?*

When Jesus told his apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, are we to understand that he was speaking of all that comprises what we call the *New Testament?* If so, it was an impossible command, for most of them did not even live to see such an arrangement of scripture. And even had Jesus then and there handed them copies of the New Testament no two of them could have gone forth and preached the same thing, for they would have had divergent views of its meaning – just as we all do today. Surely we can see that Jesus was referring to a specific message, a proclamation of certain heavenly facts to be believed. This is why Paul in 1 Cor. 1:21 spoke of the gospel as “the thing preached.” This is why he could speak of “obeying the gospel,” for the gospel is one thing and obeying it is something else. This is why he could refer to “the defense and confirmation of the gospel,” for the gospel is one thing, while to defend it and confirm it are something else.

## The *Kerugma*

This is a problem that has long concerned the theological world. Recently I listened to tapes on a conference on the nature of the *kerugma* (gospel) held at Union Seminary in Richmond. The conferees were weighing the question as to whether, in the light of what *kerugma* really means, the church of today is truly preaching the gospel, even the great evangelists. They named several popular preachers, asking in each case *Is he kerugmatic?* They concluded that the preacher who is always moralizing, or didactic, or doctrinaire is not a *gospel* preacher. It is he who stresses the love, mercy, and grace of God as manifested in the Christ and who draws from events in the life of Jesus to underscore God's philanthropy to man who preaches the gospel.

This is to distinguish between *preaching* (*kerugma*) and *teaching* (*didache*), and the leaders at this conference recognized this distinction, pointing to the research of C. H. Dodd as responsible for this being accepted in theological circles today.

It is noteworthy that Alexander Campbell, when he set down the essentials for restoration, was careful to define the gospel and to distinguish it from theories and doctrines. Indeed, though modern scholars are oblivious to the fact, he anticipated C. H. Dodd in his findings on *gospel* and *doctrine*.

Says Campbell in his *Synopsis of Reform*:

*The gospel is not a theory, a doctrine, a system of moral or spiritual philosophy; not even the theory of faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, adoption, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.*

While he recognizes that faith, repentance and baptism are necessary for entrance into the Christian church, he insists that this is not the gospel. Nor is any theory of faith, repentance, baptism, justification, the Holy Spirit, etc. the gospel. Nor is any biblical presentation of these or any combination of these the gospel.

This does havoc to what many of us have been calling "gospel sermons." Campbell says that a clear, scriptural sermon on faith, repentance and baptism is not *gospel* preaching. It may of course be the truth, and even related to the gospel, and yet not be *the gospel*.

Then what is the gospel? Campbell makes the definition clear: "The gospel is the proclamation in the name of God of remission of sins and eternal life through the sacrifice and mediation of Jesus Christ, to everyone that obeys him in the instituted way.

In approaching the question in another way, he observes that the gospel is *the faith* as distinguished from *faith*. *The faith* is belief and trust in God's act of love through Christ. It is acceptance of the event of Christ in history. *Faith* on the other hand is belief or conviction regarding numerous teachings of the scriptures. One may believe that he should partake of the Lord's Supper each first day. This is *faith*, but no part of *the faith*. *The faith* is centered in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins. One who accepts this has accepted *the faith*, even though he may be confused on many matters *of faith*.

Campbell says further of the nature of the gospel: “It is a clear, full, and authoritative statement of pardon and eternal life from the philanthropy of God through the interposition of Jesus in a positive institution.”

He uses big words, doesn't he? He is saying that the gospel is the good news that man can be saved from his sin by way of God's loving act in giving Christ to the world. It would be proper to say therefore, Campbell being right, that when preaching deals with the theme of God's love through Christ it is *gospel* preaching.

It may be clearer now what we mean in saying that the gospel is *in* the scriptures but not to be identified with them. It is like saying that the gospel is the truth of God but not all the truth of God is the gospel. One might “preach” (*teach* is more accurate) the truth about many subjects without preaching the gospel.

## Preaching and Teaching

The distinction between *preaching* and *teaching* is therefore most important. It is like the difference between enrolling students in school and instructing them in the curriculum, or in inducting soldiers and training them.

How does all this relate to unity of Christians and the fellowship of the saints? Our point is as was Campbell's, that unity is based upon the person of Christ (the gospel), that when people believe in him and obey him in baptism they are one together. They are *one* when they are *won* by the gospel. Fellowship is the sharing of the common life that grows out of that relationship of the oneness in Jesus.

On this matter there can be no ambiguity, no compromise, no reason for differences. If one believes in Jesus and is baptized, like Mark 16:16 says, he is one with all others who have so believed and obeyed. He is therefore in the fellowship when he believes the one *fact* (the gospel) and obeys the one *act* (baptism which is the response to the gospel).

This should answer the charge that is often made that some of us who are pleading for a deeper sense of fellowship believe in “fellowshipping anybody and everybody.” Yes, we believe “anybody and everybody” that is *in Christ* (through faith and obedience) are our brothers and within the fellowship.

We further contend, again with brother Campbell, that fellowship is not contingent upon conformity of belief in matters of doctrine. It may be contingent upon *sincerity*, but men can be sincere and still hold different views about many points of doctrine (which we distinguish from *the gospel*). This is why we have been saying that we can hold different views about all the things that keep us divided – whether music, classes, serving the Supper, premillennialism, pastor system, cooperative enterprises – and still enjoy fellowship in Christ together. It is because all these things are, more or less (mostly *less*) related to the *didache* (doctrine), which is *not* the basis of unity, and not related to the *kerugma* (gospel) which *is* the basis of unity.

*Then this means we may be in the fellowship with a man who is in error?*, we are asked. Yes and No. It depends on what the error is. The man who is in error about Christ, such as believing that he

was a great man but still only a man, or one who refuses to yield himself to Christ by being baptized, cannot be considered within the fellowship, for God has not “called him into fellowship of his Son through the gospel,” as the apostle puts it.

The answer is *Yes* we may enjoy unity with the brother who holds erroneous views about various points of doctrine. Who of us does not? Who will stand up and say he is right on all the teachings of scripture? A brother’s error may be serious, so serious that it places strains upon the shared life in Jesus (fellowship), and for this reason we should be concerned and do what we can to correct it through loving tender care. But such error does not itself nullify the fellowship. It did not in the case of Paul and Peter, who had rather serious differences.

*When then is fellowship disrupted?*, we are asked. In two circumstances according to the scriptures: When a brother becomes a heretic and when a brother *leads* a life of immorality. I say *leads* such a life, like the fornicator at Corinth, but not the brother who unintentionally errs out of weakness. The heretic is the insincere trouble-maker who is intent upon injuring the body of Christ for his own selfish gain.

If those who read this article are in Christ, then they are my brothers beloved. Our being one in Christ and sharing in him the common life of love does not depend upon our agreeing upon what is set forth here. While I think it a serious error to confuse the nature of the gospel, which explains why I am writing as I am, men may hold such divergent views and still be brothers together. So with all these other things that have cursed us through the years by harangues and debates. Some of them may be serious errors and others not so serious. But whether serious or not, such differences cannot be allowed to impair the communion of saints.

And it is in *that* state, in the relationship of love, goodwill, and brotherhood, that we are more likely to achieve more conformity of viewpoint which in some instances is surely important, rather than in that context where we separate into warring camps and have a big debate.

It is in the former spirit that I write to you now, within the context of the communion of the saints, for I *do* believe very strongly that it is vitally important that we come to understand the true nature of the gospel. I share with Alexander Campbell the conviction that clarification on the area will save us from a legion of woes.

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## Chapter 11

# The Essence of the Campbell Plea

*Leroy Garrett*

James Wallis was one of the heroes of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Britain. Once a Scotch Baptist, he accepted “the Plea” through the writings of Alexander Campbell. For over a quarter of a century he yielded considerable influence among the British churches as the editor of the *Christian Messenger*, a journal he himself had founded.

In 1837 he wrote a letter to Mr. Campbell, which was published both in his paper and Mr. Campbell's, in which he named what he saw as the essence of “the reformation” led by Mr. Campbell, the term he always used to identify the Movement. Wallis' insight is of value to us, not only because it provides some understanding of how our British pioneers in those days compared in their thinking to our pioneers in America, but it challenges us to have a more precise concept of what our pioneers were trying to do. We are usually rather vague in our understanding as to what it was all about. But there was nothing vague about Wallis' concept. He wrote as follows to Mr. Campbell in reference to what he called “that all-important truth”:

It is to you, brother Campbell, under the providence of a kind and gracious God, that myself and others in this place are indebted for a more clear and correct knowledge of that all-important truth which in these days of darkness is kept so much out of view – viz, that the religion of Jesus is founded altogether upon the knowledge and belief of facts, instead of abstract influences of mystic operations upon the mind. (Mill. Harb., 1837, p. 239)

The Britisher saw in Campbell's movement what has been unclear to many Americans: that Campbell called for the unity of all Christians only upon an allegiance to the facts of the gospel. Campbell saw a fact as something done. In reference to the gospel that would be what God has done through Christ for man's redemption. This distinguishes a fact from truth – all facts are of course truths, but all truths are not facts. That God exists is a truth, that God created the universe is a fact as well as a truth. Believers become one when they believe and respond to what God has done in Christ, *facts*, not by opinions, theories, or deductions about those facts, even if they are truths. There are many truths that God has given, but only the facts of the gospel save and unite people in Christ.

Brother Campbell thus distinguished between the apostles' doctrine (teaching), which consists of many truths, and the gospel, which consists of such basic facts as the death (for our sins), burial, and resurrection of Christ. In believing and obeying the gospel (facts) sinners become Christians and are one in Christ. Other truths of Scripture, such as the apostles' teaching, are of course true and important to maturity in the faith, but they are not the gospel, which is what brings us into Christ and makes us one.

There are many Scriptures that point up this distinction, but 1 Cor. 4:15 is especially clear: “Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” Paul was the spiritual father of the Corinthians because it

was he that preached the gospel to them. Once in Christ by believing and obeying the gospel, they had numerous teachers who instructed them in doctrine. The apostle makes the same distinction in 1 Cor. 15:1-4 where he defines the gospel he had preached to them as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

If we Americans all these years could have been as insightful as James Wallis, it would have spared us many crippling divisions. In presuming that “all the New Testament” is the gospel and the basis of unity, we have made our own opinions and theories tests of fellowship. Rather than a simple response to the gospel we have made societies, instrumental music, Sunday Schools, methods of serving Communion, etc. conditions of accepting each other as faithful brethren. We have deceived ourselves into concluding that such things are part of the gospel since they are deductions we draw from something the New Testament says or doesn't say. We badly err when we make our opinion or preference, such as singing only a cappella, part of the gospel.

The Britisher saw clearly what happens when something beside the gospel itself is made a test of fellowship. After telling Mr. Campbell about a new church that had begun in Nottingham, England on Christmas Day, 1836, based on “the principles of the reformation,” he said in the same letter: “I trust that we are all fully convinced that so long as human opinions are to be made the bond of union in the congregation of the Messiah, there will of necessity be divisions among the disciples.

I fear that after a century and a half we are not fully convinced, for we go right on separating from each other over our opinions and deductions. Differences among believers do not themselves divide, for Christians always have and always will have differences, just as Peter and Paul had. It is making our differences a test of fellowship. It is the old satanic attitude of, “If you don't agree with me and do it my way, then you are unfaithful to the gospel and I will not accept you.”

But we have blessings to count. We have those through history, like James Wallis of England, who clearly discerned what our heritage is all about. We can save ourselves from obscurantism and sectarianism by taking to heart these principles of our heritage. They are wonderfully simple and simply wonderful. The first is that we can all unite upon the facts of the gospel, even when we differ on the implications of those facts. The second is that whenever we allow opinions to be made tests of fellowship it will necessarily cause divisions among believers.

These truths will show us that we can have churches that support certain agencies and those that do not, and yet they can be united and work together and accept each other as equals. We can have churches that are premillennial and some that are amillennial, and even some that have hardly heard of the millennium, and yet be of one heart in serving Jesus Christ. We can have churches that use the instrument in singing and those that are a cappella, and even some that hardly sing at all, and yet accept each other in love and forbearance.

This means that, of course, we will be in the fellowship with folk that are “in error,” for we are all in error on some things since none of us is perfect. It is the nature of the error that matters. Our forebears were discerning in this regards also. Brother Campbell distinguished between errors of the mind (“imbecility of intellect” he called it ) and errors of the heart, the latter being much more serious.

One might be sincerely mistaken about various doctrines (He is still growing!) and yet right about Jesus Christ. That should be no threat to fellowship. It is only when one is unfaithful to Jesus Christ, when he has a bad heart, or when he rejects the simplicity of the gospel itself that unity and fellowship are made impossible.

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## Chapter 12

# The Death of a Dream

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

In the art gallery at Bergano, in Italy, hangs a picture by Raphael, with an aura of romance about it. It is a painting of the *Virgin and the Child*. When Napoleon invaded Italy, and Milan and Bergano fell into his hands, he gave orders to collect the priceless art treasures to be sent away as spoils to the Louvre in Paris. An unknown painter in Berano swiftly painted a rough, crude landscape over the canvas of Raphael. The captors, regarding it as worthless, left it behind.

In the years of turmoil which followed the picture became lost. No one recognized its true value. It was in the year 1868 that the hastily-daubed paint began to peel and flake off. Men who were adept at restoring ancient paintings were given the task of removing the accretions until finally the original could again be seen in all of the glory conveyed to it by the master artist.

In the summer of 1809, in the simple frontier home of a Dr. Welch, near the village of Washington, Pennsylvania, a humble Irish immigrant sat down at a small table in an upstairs room. He had recently been unfrocked as a Presbyterian minister because of his charitable heart which refused to confine the grace of God within the pale of a small segment of his sect. Now, at the age of forty-six, he was free in Christ to explore those means by which peace might be restored to a church militant against herself. Dipping a quill into the inkpot he began to inscribe upon foolscap the words which flowed from a heart burdened with grief over the schisms which had rent the family of God into warring tribes.

When he had finished writing, and dried his feathered quill, he called the document he held in his hand, "A Declaration and Address." When he read it to friends and neighbors gathered to hear it on September 7, they gave it their unanimous approval, and ordered it to be printed and distributed. One-hundred-and-sixty-two years have now come and gone and have faded into the blue haze which we call history since Mr. Campbell stood up to read his production to backwoods neighbors, yet I have no hesitancy in saying to you that I regard it as one of the greatest uninspired documents written by the human hand.

Like the famous charter signed by King John on the field of Runnymede, June 15, 1215, and which became the basis of English constitutional liberties, the declaration of Thomas Campbell became the Magna Charta of all those who respect the lordship of Jesus, leading the way to freedom from clericalism, creedism and ecclesiastical tyranny. Its purpose was probably best stated by Alexander Campbell, a son of the author, some twenty-six years after its inception.

"A deep and abiding impression that the power, the consolation and joys – the holiness and happiness – of Christ's religion were lost in the forms and ceremonies, in the speculations and conjectures, the feuds and bickerings of sects and schisms, originated a project many years ago for uniting the sects, or rather the *Christians* in all sects, upon a clear and scriptural bond of union, – upon having a 'thus saith the Lord,' either in express terms or in approved precedent, 'for every article of faith, and item of

religious practice.’ This was offered in the year 1809, in the ‘Declaration and Address’ of the Washington Association, Pennsylvania.”

Mr. Campbell further called it “the first effort known to us to abandon the whole controversy about creeds and reformatations, and to *restore* primitive Christianity, or build alone upon the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner.”

Some facts are immediately obvious. This was to be a work of *recovery*. It was dedicated to recovering the power, consolations, joys, holiness and happiness of the religion of Christ. It was to be a work of *renewal*. It sought to renew faith and sentiments which made the Way so invincible in its primal era. It was to be a work of *restoration*. It was devoted to restoring the ancient order in practice and ordinances. It was to be a work of *reformation*. It was directed toward correcting the diction, purifying the language, and thus recapturing the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. And this meant not just speaking where the Bible speaks, but speaking *as* the Bible speaks.

The goal was the union, peace and harmonious co-operation of all of the children of God. This was the glorious dream, the majestic obsession. How was it to be accomplished? How was it to differ from the enfeebled sectarian thrusts of the past? What thoughts pulsed through the mind of Thomas Campbell as he wrote? Listen, as I detail for you a few of the noble concepts penned by this humble Irish Presbyterian.

### **Noble Concepts**

1. At the outset it was to be recognized that the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one, consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct. It begins with a recognition and affirmation of unity, not as something to be achieved by Christians, Unity in Christ is not a goal, but a gift, It is a state in which to share, not a status for which to strive.

Every believer who is in Jesus is in Jesus with every other believer who is in him. Every person who is joined to Jesus as head is joined to every other member who is joined to Jesus. And it makes no difference what else he may be in through ignorance, tradition, or early conditioning. We become one body in him by the action of God and not through a faction of men. The church on earth is essentially one! It is intentionally one! It is constitutionally one! And this unity is beyond the power of man to affect.

2. The articles of faith and the terms of communion are divinely stated and must never be abridged, augmented or amended by men. Nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as an article of faith, nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God.
3. With respect to commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the Scriptures are silent as to the express time, manner of performance, if any such there be, no human authority has power to interfere in order to supply the supposed deficiency by making laws for the Church. Nor can anything more be required of Christians in such cases, but only that they so observe the

commandments and ordinances as will evidently answer the declared and obvious ends of their institution.

4. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians further than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so, for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but properly do belong to the after and progressive education of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions of inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.
5. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths and defensive testimonies, in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for these purposes the better; yet as these must be, in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion, unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the Church from the beginning did, and ever will consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

What we have cited is sufficient to demonstrate that it was radical and revolutionary in the very best sense of those terms. It begins with a predication of the inherent oneness of the church, and the defines the constituency thereof upon the basis of personal profession, validated by conduct and character. It proposes to maintain this oneness inviolate by excluding from articles of faith and terms of fellowship that which the word of God does not positively specify. It forbids legislation and binding of laws in areas of silence by any human authority, denying to any person or persons the prerogative of filling in the blanks for God.

But of especial importance is the safeguard erected around that hallowed watchword of the Reformation led by Martin Luther, "the right of private interpretation of the sacred scriptures." No inference or deduction from Scriptural premises, even if it may truly be called the doctrine of God's holy Word, is formally binding upon the conscience of any Christian further than he can personally see the connection or plainly perceive that it is so. Therefore, no such deduction can ever be made terms or conditions of fellowship, but belong rather to the gradual growth and maturity of the saints.

It was further provided that doctrinal exhibitions, explanations and interpretations of the great system of divine truths, even in opposition to prevailing errors, were not to be made tests of fellowship. In such reasonings it is obvious that inferential truths will be found, and not everyone has the degree of doctrinal information, or the clear and decisive judgment essential to determining for himself the truth and validity of such matters. If these things are made terms of communion, many will be admitted to the fellowship upon a second – hand or borrowed faith which they can neither understand nor explain. Their confidence will not rest in the Christ but be imposed in a preacher or presbyter.

This completely removed fellowship in Christ Jesus from the sphere of the extent of knowledge or the degree of comprehension of apostolic doctrine, and centered it in the gospel, the good news of Jesus. It made fellowship contingent upon acceptance of him who is our hope and salvation. By making our creed a person instead of a code, and our sharing in life dependent upon faith rather than upon

knowledge of a system of doctrines, all of the controversies over creeds and formulae were forever rendered obsolete and irrelevant.

Was this grand design effective? Would it work? History shows that it kindled fresh hope in the humble hearts of hardened frontiersmen. They carried the torch and spread the glowing flame across the land. The citadels of sectarianism shook and trembled as if in a mighty wind. Party walls were breached and crumbled. Those who had been shackled by sectarian chains threw off their cruel fetters. Factional loyalties were forgotten. Prejudices were laid aside and banished from the heart. Wherever opposition reared its ugly head, the victory was hastened and augmented.

### **The Aylett Raine Case**

Early in the history of the noble experiment a severe test was made to determine whether men could be united by faith in Christ Jesus, while at the same time holding divergent opinions in regard to speculative matters, and whether fellowship could be sustained on such a basis. Aylett Raines was a prominent preacher in a religious sect which promoted the tenet that no one would be eternally and irretrievably lost, but that ultimate salvation would be the lot of every man. The sect was built around this as its cardinal dogma.

Mr. Raines went to hear Walter Scott and became convinced that he had never obeyed the gospel. He engaged in discussion with a Mr. Williams, another preacher in the sect of which he was a member, and he also agreed that Mr. Scott was correct. The two went down into the waters of the river, and in turn baptized one another for the remission of sins.

When Mr. Raines presented himself for the reception into the Mahoning Association, objections were made by some to receiving him while he clung to his views about ultimate universal salvation. But Thomas Campbell arose and deplored the fact that such a question would ever be introduced in a congregation of brethren. He said, "Brother Raines has been with me during the last several months and we have fully unbosomed ourselves to each other. He is philosophically a Restorationist and I as a Calvinist, but notwithstanding this difference of opinion between us, I would put my right hand into the fire and have it burned off, before I would hold up my hands against him. And from all I know of Brother Raines, if I were Paul, I would have him in preference to any young man of my acquaintance, to be my Timothy."

After Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott spoke and showed the difference between preaching the everlasting gospel and holding an opinion about some point of doctrine, Mr. Raines was received by an overwhelming majority. A historian who personally knew and worked with Aylett Raines wrote: "A practical demonstration was thus given that the disciples of Christ could unite on the plain and express teaching of the New Testament, in spite of conflicting opinions in regard to questions of doubtful and speculative nature. It was clearly shown by this transaction and its results, that the divisions of the Christian world over matters of a purely philosophical nature, are useless, as the Scriptures show them to be sinful. The two extremes of Calvinism and Universalism met and shook hands in fraternal fellowship upon the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ – a fellowship that human opinions could not break."

It was in the early part of 1832, however, that the genius and nature of the restoration ideal to effect the unity of believers, was most forcefully demonstrated. At Lexington, Kentucky, some of the followers

of Barton W. Stone, known as Christians, and some of those who shared the views of Alexander Campbell, known as Disciples, met to pray and labor for possible union. Hitherto, the movements had gone their separate ways, with only individual fraternization in certain communities. Now they seemed to be drawn toward one another by one Spirit.

John Smith closed an impassioned address with these words: "Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites, or Stonites, or New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us come to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the light that we need."

When he had finished his message, Barton W. Stone arose, spoke a few words, and publicly extended his hand to Smith as a token of fellowship. As the two men stood with clasped hands, the audience arose, weeping and singing and praising God. For the first time in the history of the Christian era, two separate bodies were joining into one through love of truth, and despite their differences. Those differences were many and to lesser men would have seemed insuperable. They embraced the nature of the Godhood, the nature of atonement, the name to be worn, the polity of the church, the work of the Spirit, and the design of baptism.

But all of them believed there was one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father who is over all, through all, and in all. This constituted the unity of the Spirit, and this they held and resolved to maintain in the bond of peace. From now on they would discuss all of their differences, but they would do so as brethren and not as members of warring tribes. They had demonstrated to a watching world that unity in diversity could be real, vibrant and powerful.

Men could be one in Christ who were of varied opinions, interpretations and understanding. The dream in the hearts of fervent pioneers had climbed to a soul in answer to the prayer of God's precious Son. And it was into the movement born of that dream that I came from the toils of sectarianism as a simple country lad.

### **What Happened To The Dream?**

Then what of that vision in our generation? How have the heirs dealt with this servant sent unto them in the vineyard? It is with a deep sense of regret and shame that I confess that the magnificent project inaugurated to unite the Christians in all of the sects has fallen from its high estate. Even as I speak to you it is one of the most splintered and fragmented movements on the American scene. With the sharp darts of partisan prejudice its members have attacked one another publicly through the press and over the air waves. Rival segments have jostled and jockeyed one another for prestige and position while the sword of the Spirit has been driven into the quivering hearts of brethren and fratricidal gore has marked the sands of the arena of debate and dissension.

We have divided and formed antagonistic cliques over everything from how to take the Good News to the world, to how to pass the Lord's Supper to the congregation. Our only approach to differences has been division, and our only approach to division has been sectarian debate. In spite of the fact that every time the Spirit mentions division in the family of God it is condemned, we could not be more divided if the word of God commanded and enjoined it.

We are divided over missionary societies, instrumental music, centralized control, colleges, orphan homes, national radio and television programs, the right to own television sets, leavened bread,

unleavened bread, the manner of breaking the bread, fermented wine, individual cups, Bible classes, uninspired literature, evangelists, the hiring of ministers, the pastor system, marriage of divorced persons, speaking in tongues, divine healing, foot-washing, the hour of meeting to eat the Lord's Supper, and a host of other things. And every division has been brought about by someone esteeming an opinion of greater value than the blood of Christ. Those who stand together one week and sing "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," sever it the following week over some trivial concept.

## **Errors Of The Past**

It is with a sense of sadness and remorse that I acknowledge that, in my earlier days, motivated by a false sense of loyalty, and impelled by ignorance, I felt that one faction constituted the kingdom of God upon earth. I refused to call upon God's children in other parties to even petition our common Father in my meetings. In my bigotry I felt that all others on earth were my brethren in error, and to be held in contempt, while our group alone basked in the sunlight of divine favor. The blatant inconsistency of the sectarian attitude never entered my mind, until the grace of God reached out one day and touched me as never before, and the love of God was poured out abundantly in my poor shriveled heart.

Now, having been set free by the grace of God, I am irrevocably opposed to all sectarianism, even our own. And I am unconditionally opposed to that spirit of narrow exclusivism which separates and segregates brethren in Christ Jesus, and erects artificial walls – paper curtains – to keep them apart from and constantly suspicious of one another. I shall never again become the champion of any clan, the front man for any faction, or the proponent for any party. I shall belong only to the Lord Jesus Christ, body, soul and spirit. I will carry no factional banner and wave no factional flag. I shall flaunt no factional badge and no factional tag.

I will cross over every barrier, break through every wall, and ignore every fence which men have erected in Christ Jesus my Lord. I will labor with all of my brethren who permit me to do so, and love those who will not. My only creed is Christ, and while I respect every rock of truth scattered over God's revelational landscape, I will build upon none of them. My hope of heaven depends not so much upon propagating a party to defend a truth as it does in personally casting myself in absolute dependence upon him who is the truth. And while every truth is precious to me, and will be included as discovered in my rock garden for meditation and enjoyment, I will plant my trust only upon him whom God planted his community, the Rock of Ages! For other foundation can no man lay!

## **No Half-Brothers**

This means that every child of God is my brother. And I have no half-brothers or step-brothers in the Lord. I accept you where you are and as you are. I accept you as God accepted me, in my weakness, frailty and failures, If you are good enough to be his son or daughter you are not too bad to be my brother or sister. And I receive you, and receive you now. We can stop this silly march into oblivion. We can halt the cancerous growth of division which is slowly consuming the body. We do not need to wait until we have debated every action of every faction. We can be one in Christ Jesus now! All we need to do is to extend the hand of fellowship in spite of differences, as did the brethren in Lexington, almost a century-and-a-half ago, and we can be blessed as peacemakers and deserving to be called the children of God.

I have brethren who, in good conscience, can accompany their praise service to God, with instruments of music; I have brethren whose consciences will not allow them to do so. I have brethren who give money to support Herald of Truth and never look at it; I have brethren who refuse to support it and never miss seeing it. I have brethren who teach Sunday Schools with classes for all ages, and others who gather in undivided assemblies to study the sacred pages. I have brethren who remember the shedding of the blood while drinking from individual cups; I have brethren who pass one container to the body of saints. They are all my brethren. I love them all.

I refuse any longer to play God with any of their lives and thoughts. To their own master they must stand or fall. I will not set at naught my brother. I will not destroy him for whom Jesus died because of my personal conviction about things. The blood of Jesus which makes us one is more important to me than the things about which we dispute inside the family. Our differences are occasions for discussion, but not for division.

If one of my brethren testifies to an experience with the Spirit of God which I have neither had nor sought, I shall not call him a liar, nor shall I drive him forth from the family circle. I shall spread about him the warmth and compassion which all of us need so much, and will cherish him although I may not condone his experience. We are not one because we have had the same experience in the flesh but because we are in One who experienced the same thing in the flesh for all of us. To him be our praise!

For decades the dream that we might be one has been sleeping in the hidden sepulcher of forgotten hopes. Betrayed in the house of its friends, stabbed to death by the hands of those it had cradled at birth, laid to rest in a grave above which its own offspring has continued to wage intestine war, its memory has all but faded from the field of theological encounter.

But now another fullness of times has come! The spiritual womb of hope cries out to be delivered. We must roll away the stone of contention with which our fathers sealed the mouth of the tomb. We must see the glorious ideal which they laid away, resurrected, to come forth clad not in the garb of the nineteenth century secular age, and an ecumenical era.

It is high time to arouse out of sleep. Our salvation is now nearer than when we believed. Let us direct the dynamic of the love of God against the walls which have been opaque, and see them become transparent so that we can envision our brethren on both sides of them. Let us forget the fear of what men may do unto us, and reach out our hands to those we once spurned. Let us learn to love those who differ with us, and find that peace that passes understanding. Let us not wait. Let us do it now!

I have steadfastly set my face in the direction of the unity of all believers in Christ Jesus my Lord. I shall pray for it, plead for it, and proclaim it. I shall never be deterred. I shall never become discouraged. I will never be satisfied until all of us regard one another as God regards all of us. And when the time comes that the pen drops from my nerveless fingers, and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth, I shall rest content, if on the gray marble above my head can be chiseled the words, "He preached peace to them that are afar off and to them that are nigh!"

*(Mission Messenger, 1972, Book: The Divine Purpose)*

## Chapter 13

# The Sand Creek Address

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

**“It is not, therefore, within the province of this court to pronounce judgment upon the doctrines taught by Alexander Campbell and believed and practiced by his followers, or to determine which faction of the Sand Creek congregation, in their practices in their church congregation, from an ecclesiastical standpoint, is correct, as the courts have no concern with the questions whether a religious congregation is progressive or conservative; whether a musical instrument shall be present or absent during church services; whether the preacher shall be selected from the congregation or shall be a person employed by the congregation for a stated time at a stated salary; whether missionary societies and Sunday schools shall have separate organizations from the church congregations or not, of whether the funds necessary for the support of the church shall be contributed wholly by its members or raised in part by fairs and festivals. All these questions, and kindred questions, must be left to the determination of the church congregation.”**

This is an excerpt from the decision of the Supreme Court of the State of Illinois in the case of “The Christian Church of Sand Creek, Shelby County, Illinois, versus The Church of Christ at Sand Creek.” The opinion was filed on February 21, 1906. It was read by Mr. Justice Hand with all of the six other justices concurring. This case was typical of many which plagued the heirs of the restoration movement at the dawn of the twentieth century. The decision was presented the same year that David Lipscomb informed the United States Census Bureau that a separate listing under the title “Churches of Christ” should be accorded those congregations which opposed instrumental music and certain other things. Formal decision was now an established fact among those who had started out to answer the prayer of the Savior for the unity of all believers.

The year of 1830 is famous in Illinois history because it marked the arrival of the Lincoln family who migrated from Kentucky, coming by way of Indiana. Many of the Kentuckians came the same year and some of them planted the first congregation of disciples in the state at Jacksonville. Two years later Barton W. Stone moved to Jacksonville and from that time on his *Christian Messenger* was published there. In 1834 enough of the settlers in Shelby County had been converted to the restoration plea that John Storm and Bushrod Henry organized a congregation at Sand Creek and erected a log meetinghouse. In 1836 Tobias Grider united with the congregation and became its pioneer elder as well as a preacher of the gospel. Sometime later Peter P. Warren became associated with him as an elder and preacher.

There was little in the inception or early history of the rural congregation to indicate that it would have a prominent role in the unfolding drama of strife and division in the ranks of the restoration movement. But fate plays strange tricks and destiny, like lightning, strikes in unexpected places. Almost half a century passed and the little country church swelled again when the maturing young people in the community were immersed at the annual meeting. Many of these were forced to go elsewhere for work but they carried with them the fond memory of the place where they were baptized. Each August the Sand Creek congregation had a special gathering which was virtually a

homecoming, a mass meeting attended by hundreds. Homes in the community were thrown wide open in hospitality. Basket dinners were served on Saturday and Sunday under the trees in the yard of the meetinghouse. The surrounding woods were filled with teams that had drawn loaded wagons, buggies and surreys to the scene.

Prominent preachers were secured for this annual event and the influence of the meetings was far-reaching. When the restoration began to be troubled and disturbed by introduction of the innovations that were creeping in, it was decided that Sand Creek was the place best suited to making a stand in opposition to these things. The annual meeting presented an unparalleled opportunity because of the number in attendance and their favorable attitude toward the congregation. The decision was not made hastily. It was discussed fully and deliberately. The leaders of the congregation were encouraged by a thirty-seven year old evangelist who had just purchased the *American Christian Review* in 1887.

### **Daniel Sommer**

Daniel Sommer was born near Washington, D. C., January 11, 1850, of poverty-stricken German parents. A serious minded youngster, he was induced to unite with the Methodists, but upon learning the plea of the restoration movement, he accepted it. Having a desire to preach the gospel he enrolled in Bethany College where he continued some two years. After the death of Benjamin Franklin at Anderson, Indiana, on October 22, 1878, the paper which he had published became a medium for advertising. The main source of revenue came from manufacturers of patent medicines and nostrums. Daniel Sommer bought the paper with borrowed money and began as editor by discarding all worldly advertisements. The decision to do this created great hardship.

He was assisted in this enterprise by some members at Sand Creek, Illinois, and two of the elders jointly signed a note with him to secure money from a Dr. Oliver, to apply on purchase of the paper. Soon after he assumed editorship he urged the leaders at Sand Creek to “draw a line against the innovators” and proposed to publicize their action as an example to other congregations faced with the same problems. Other congregations in the vicinity of Sand Creek were consulted and expressed a willingness to concur in any action thus taken. It was decided to draw up a document which would recognize “a formal division” and amount to “disfellowship” of those who advocated certain practices. To make it more impressive the statement was to be called “An Address and Declaration.” This was a play on the term “Declaration and Address” which was the designation of the famous document presented by Thomas Campbell exactly eighty years before.

### **The Sand Creek Declaration**

Peter P. Warren was selected to write and publicly read the statement. It was agreed that it would be presented on Saturday afternoon, August 17, 1889, and that the reading would be preceded by a discourse on “Innovations” delivered by Daniel Sommer. This procedure was followed and the document was signed by six representatives for the Sand Creek Church, four for the Liberty Church, and one each for the Ash Grove Church, the Union Church, and the Mode Church. An addendum stated, “Elder Colson of Gays, and Elder Hoke of Strickland congregations signed, but as individuals only, because the congregations whence they came, had not been called together so as to send them formally. Green Creek congregation, by a letter from Bro. Jesse Baker, endorsed the movement.”

The “Address and Declaration” began with a statement of the original ideals of the disciples in the restoration movement. It pointed out that peace and harmony prevailed so long as these ideals were treasured. It then called attention to some painful facts and considerations made necessary because “there are those among us who teach and practice things not taught nor found in the New Testament.”

**“Some of the things of which we hereby complain, and against which we protest, are the unlawful methods resorted to in order to raise or get money for religious purposes, namely, that of the church holding festivals of various kinds, in the house of the Lord or elsewhere, demanding sometimes that each participant shall pay a certain sum as an admittance fee; the select choir to the virtual, if not the real, abandonment of congregational singing; likewise the manmade society for missionary work, and the one man imported preacherpastor to take the oversight of the church. These with many other objectionable and unauthorized things are now taught and practiced in many of the congregations, and that to the great grief and mortification of some of the members of said congregations.”**

It is interesting to note that the question of instrumental music is not specifically mentioned in the document although it may have been referred to as part of the “many other objectionable and unauthorized things.” The aim and intent of the action is specified in the final paragraph.

**“It is, therefore, with the view, if possible, of counteracting the usages and practices that have crept into the churches, that this effort on the part of the congregations hereafter named is made, and now, in closing up this address and declaration, we state that we are impelled from a sense of duty to say, that all that are guilty of teaching, or allowing and practicing the many innovations and corruptions to which we have referred, that after being admonished, and having had sufficient time for reflection, if they do not turn away from such abominations, that we can not and will not regard them as brethren.”**

After Daniel Sommer purchased the *American Christian Review* he changed its name to *Octographic Review*, and true to his promise he published the “Address and Declaration” in that paper, with added observations of his own. He pointed out that there had long been discussions about “the question of drawing a line of demarcation between the churches of Christ and our innovating brethren.” The matter had even been agitated in columns of the *Review* ten years before “but it was then thought by the brethren generally that some other solution than a formal division could be reached.” He charged the innovating disciples with being “the dividers of the brotherhood” and declared, “They have abandoned our original position and have gone out from us because they were not of us.” However, he wrote, “Let it be distinctly understood that we have from the first agitation on this subject been numbered with those who earnestly endeavored to find some other solution of the problem than a formal separation.” The editorial concluded in this fashion:

**“If this sentence of an inspired apostle be adopted throughout the brotherhood, then the time will come that our Modern School Brethren will have fixed upon them the odium of having by division disgraced the best cause on earth and having thereby become a party among parties, a sect among sects, a denomination among denominations. In the meantime the loyal disciples will become more firmly than ever established in their original principle in contending for the**

**faith once delivered to the saints, and endeavoring to establish everywhere the Kingdom of Christ as it was in the beginning. Amen.”**

The year prior to the one in which Peter P. Warren wrote the “Address and Declaration” was the one in which David Lipscomb, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* first presented his thesis on “Civil Government” in the *Christian Quarterly Review*. Having gone through the tragic period of “Reconstruction” following the Civil War, Lipscomb reached the conclusion that all civil government originated with and belonged to Satan and that a Christian could not hold office or even vote at the polls. This view was not generally acceptable in the North and there was a considerable amount of feeling engendered over it and other issues. But David Lipscomb endorsed the “Sand Creek Declaration” and gave his commendation to its authors.

### **Personal Observations**

Later on in our investigation we will detail the series of events which led to the Sand Creek church trial, for we cannot ignore this and correctly portray the rise of factionalism. Before doing this, however, it seems appropriate to make some personal observations relative to the “Address and Declaration.” Two years after the Supreme Court of Illinois rendered the decision referred to at the outset of this article, I was born in a rude two-room miners shack in the Missouri Lead Belt. At the time my parents knew nothing of the restoration movement. My father was a skeptic, my mother a devout Lutheran with spiritual roots running back to Denmark. My father had finished the third McGuffey's Reader, my mother could not read or write English.

By a chain of circumstances not necessary to detail at this juncture, my father heard and became convicted of the plea of the churches of Christ, and when I was five years old I saw him immersed into our Lord. Although my mother continued in the Lutheran communion until two years after I began preaching the gospel, a profound change came over our family life. The first preachers whom I ever recall seeing were Daniel Sommer and his son, D. Austen Sommer. With an insatiable hunger for knowledge I lay flat on my stomach on the grass for hours, listening as my elders talked while sitting on hickory splint bottom chairs under a shade tree in the yard.

Between the date when the Sand Creek Declaration was read and the time of my birth, all had not been harmonious among the forces opposing innovations. Contrary to expectations “the loyal disciples” had not “become more firmly established in their original principles in contending for the faith.” After having said that the most fatal mistake Alexander Campbell made was “the establishment of a school to train and educate young preachers,” David Lipscomb himself helped inaugurate the Nashville Bible School. Other schools sprang up, among them “Western Bible and Literary College,” at Odessa, Missouri. Daniel Sommer regarded these as “human institutions to do the work of the church,” and in the same category as other societies.

Daniel Sommer testified at length in the court case involving Sand Creek and received with much satisfaction the judgment of the Supreme Court of Illinois, on February 21, 1906. Less than a year later, on the afternoon of February 18, 1907, he began a debate with B. F. Rhodes at Odessa, Missouri, on the question of “the Biblical right to establish an institution of learning which is chiefly secular, in order to furnish an occasion to teach pupils in the Bible.” In 1908 he published a written “Discussion on the Bible School” with J. N. Armstrong. Thus, when I first became aware of

the restoration movement I learned to regard it as an attempt to hold the fort against “Old Digressives” and “New Digressives” as the advocates of colleges were designated.

Long before I knew anything about the “Declaration and Address” prepared by Thomas Campbell I was conversant with the “Address and Declaration” written by Peter P. Warren. In my childish mind I conceived of the church of God as having had a perfect and unbroken existence until the introduction of missionary societies and instrumental music. Then the Sand Creek document was conceived in the hearts of true and staunch defenders of the faith and proved to be the thing which salvaged truth from the rude hands of an implacable foe, restoring order out of chaos. That the cause had again been betrayed by a “southern element” was regrettable but not wholly unexpected from those in secessionist states. I grew up under the impression that there were few, if any, “loyal churches” south of the Mason and Dixon Line. Most of their members did not even read the *Review*.

Now, from more mature years and judgment, I would like to reexamine the decisions made at Sand Creek in 1889. I do this in full recognition of the price that must be paid by any person who questions the traditions of the fathers. I am aware of the fact that one must bear the stigma of “traitor” or “heretic” who dares to challenge the partisan concepts of his associates. But I am committed to an honest search for truth regardless of personal consequences. I cannot live with myself nor be prepared to meet my Lord if I compromise my conviction in a matter so important as this. I have resolved that I will shield no part of my thinking from examination and that I will accept nothing simply because it has been taught by men in the past. My faith must stand, if it stands at all, “in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men.”

In my analysis of the rise of factionalism I have come to believe that the philosophy embodied in the Sand Creek Declaration laid the foundation for the subsequent disintegration of the restoration movement. I am not especially concerned with the principals involved except as they were agents to give expression to a general feeling. Neither am I primarily concerned with the document except as it voiced the ideas held by so many. My review is not to be construed as an attack upon either the persons involved or the declaration they made. It is intended to be a searching study into the motivations and implications of thought which crystallized in the address.

For that matter, the document could well have been produced at numerous other places in 1889. The discussion of how to handle the rise of innovationism was rife in the land. In mass meetings held at Moberly and Richmond, Missouri, calls were made for just such a written expression “drawing a line of demarcation.” I do not impugn the motives nor question the sincerity of those who signed the document. Far from this, I am certain they did what they believed was best for the cause of Christ out of a deep love for the church of God.

In spite of the devotion of the author and signers the document was the product of fallible men. It originated in the thinking of men and Daniel Sommer referred to it as “the sentiments of the brethren who assemble at Sand Creek.” No document of human origin must ever become so sacred that to question it is regarded as sacrilege. We must never confuse “the traditions of the elders” with “the law of God.” No human production can ever be elevated to a sacred status without a simultaneous loss of respect for the revelation from heaven. There are those among our contemporaries who deeply resent our current research. They are fearful of the consequences. They would prefer to maintain the status quo even though it involves accepting division than to

examine with open minds the factors which produced the tragic condition. Present error has a greater lure than newly discovered truth.

### **Points of Clarification**

In our review of the Sand Creek Declaration there is no attempt to condone those things which it condemned. We do not deny that they were innovations and it is evident that they were without scriptural warrant. But there is a difference between those things and *the division* which resulted from agitation of them. The factional spirit is sinful. The party spirit is a work of the flesh. To oppose evil from a factional standpoint is as wrong as to uphold evil from any standpoint. It is not opposition to evil but the factional spirit which is wrong. It is subversive of the divine government to create a party to oppose wrong. This is a species of doing evil with the hope that good may come.

It is our opinion based upon research into the factors leading to the adoption of the policy of attempting to preserve purity by division, and upon observation of the consequences resulting from application of that policy, that it is factional in nature and essence. It is our further opinion that this policy pursued regularly as a course of action can only culminate in more divisions, and ultimately will counteract and destroy any real spiritual gains made by those who adopt it. We hold the view that this philosophy is without sanction in the sacred scriptures, that it is contrary to the examples given of the primitive *ekklesia*, and it is in contravention of the purpose of God. It originates in human wisdom prompted by fear. It proposes to maintain what has been gained by regimentation of thought.

There is little to be gained in any final analysis if, in an attempt to keep innovations from destroying the church of God, we adopt those methods which will eventually achieve the same end. If "the church" is destroyed in our generation it matters little whether it is done by those who profess to be "faithful" or by those whom they denounce as "unfaithful." A man is just as dead if shot by a faithful wife as by one who is unfaithful. The restoration movement today is splintered into more than two dozen antagonistic parties. These have been created by application of the philosophy that was adopted by our fathers three-quarters of a century ago. Since the cleavage resulting from introduction of the instrument, those opposed to its use have averaged four partisan divisions for every decade of their separate existence.

This is not all. Other divisions must follow in the future. Every time a truth is discovered, every time honest investigation forces a change of mind, there will be another division. This philosophy bars the door to further scriptural research, makes real unbiased study a crime, and places a premium on mediocrity. It throws a dam across the channel of thought, freezes the acquisition of knowledge, and constitutes an unwritten creed. It makes blind conformity a blessing and enthrones orthodoxy as the ideal. If a system, like a tree, is known by its fruits, we should eliminate this one immediately.

Let us not indulge precious time or waste our efforts in an attempt to establish guilt for what occurred three-quarters of a century in the past. Our brethren were faced with grave and serious problems. They were frightened by an oncoming wave of innovations which would destroy all they held sacred. They had to make a decision as to the best means to withstand the onslaught. Perhaps the choice was exactly the one we would have made at the time and under the circumstances. We

have the privilege of looking backward upon the outworking of their method. We can admit all the good that was done through it without perpetuating it if conditions have altered. Radium treatments may be administered to a cancer patient at one stage of his illness but if continued indefinitely may become as harmful as the disease.

I do not regard the Sand Creek Declaration as I once did. I no longer think of it as an embodiment of those means which will provide the proper answer to every situation which confronts us when men advocate things we cannot endorse. It is not a panacea for all of our spiritual ills. Indeed I think it contains within it the seed which, when ripened, may prove as destructive as the innovations it proposed to thwart. The spirit which is entombed within it will force every generation to declare nonfellowship with every preceding one. Under the influence of this thinking no congregation of fifty years ago would be recognized by present day congregations if it taught exactly as it did then, and none existing today will be regarded as faithful fifty years hence. It is doubtful if David Lipscomb or Daniel Sommer would be allowed to speak now in most of the congregations they planted. In view of these statements allow me to make some observations about the address written by Peter P. Warren.

### **A Critical Examination**

1. The Sand Creek meeting at which the document was signed was essentially a delegate convention. True there were a great many others in attendance but the signers had been formally sent as representatives or delegates of their respective congregations. The congregations had assembled and authorized them to sign in their behalf. It is specifically stated that “the brethren whose names stand alone in signing the document represented the churches from which they came.” Of two others it is said they “signed, but as individuals only, because the congregations whence they came, had not been called together so as to send them formally.”

Every one of the signers would have opposed a delegate convention to determine policy and did oppose the convention which met in Cincinnati and inaugurated the missionary society. Yet they met at Sand Creek as congregational delegates and entered a coalition, adopting and signing a document which was intended to serve as a policy making instrument in dealing with brethren who were not even present or represented. The editor of *Octographic Review* wrote, “We endorse the foregoing document as *adopted* and *signed* at the Sand Creek meeting.” All such meetings are divisive in their outworkings.

2. The Sand Creek Declaration sounded the death knell for the autonomy of the local congregation. Its very purpose was to reach out and discipline, even to the point of excommunication, those not affiliated with the congregations from which the delegates were sent. It was an ultimatum, adopted and published, which intended to transfer into the hands of certain ones the right to determine when others at a distance and not even in their congregations should no longer be regarded as brethren.

The editor of the *Octographic Review* wrote, “It does not propose to disfellowship any till they have been admonished and refuse to turn from their waywardness.” This is a clear admission that it did propose to “disfellowship” certain ones and it placed the judgment as to when to take such action in the hands of those not even remotely connected with the congregations in which some of the “guilty” ones were members. Out of this kind of reasoning grew the idea that one congregation could “disfellowship” another congregation and that the elders of one church could pronounce the

sentence of “spiritual death” upon another congregation over which they held not the slightest degree of jurisdiction. Nothing more unscriptural was ever conceived by the minds of partisan men.

It is astounding that men would meet to deal with those who “teach and practice things not taught nor found in the New Testament” and depart so far from both the letter and spirit of the new covenant scriptures. Certainly this declaration was an innovation for which no one could produce a “thus saith the Lord.” Eventually, as it always happens, the power of decision became invested in the editor of the official organ and all nonconformists were cut off without trial or appeal. All that was required to drive one forth from the party was a censure by the editor. The unfortunate victim had no recourse. He could not publish a reply to be read before those who had read the censure. The “loyal churches” did not dare call upon him or recognize him. He was given the “deep freeze” treatment by even his former friends. Branded a “traitor, heretic and apostate,” he either gave in, gave out, or gave up!

It is appropriate to remark that the Sand Creek Address and Declaration differed from the Declaration and Address written by Thomas Campbell. The purpose of the document written by Campbell was to unite the Christians in all the sects; the purpose of the document written by Peter P. Warren was to call for division among disciples. One was written to remove barriers between brethren, the other to draw a line of demarcation between them. One marked the beginning of a war against the sectarian spirit, the other marked the start of a conflict which would be waged in that spirit.

### **A Partisan Foundation**

3. Another feature must not be overlooked. The Sand Creek Declaration laid the foundation of brotherhood based upon conformity in matters of opinion, interpretation and congregational practice. Let me not be misunderstood at this juncture. Such conformity is an ideal for which to strive. Nothing less can be the goal of all who are sincerely interested in restoration of a primitive order. But there is as much difference between the basis of entering family relationship and the aims and ambitions of a family as there is between the basis of acquiring citizenship and national ideals of the citizens in the aggregate.

Regardless of all partisan appeals and propaganda to the contrary brotherhood is the result of common fatherhood. “Now the one who sanctifies and those whom he sanctifies both have the same Father, and thus he is not ashamed to call them his brothers” (Heb. 2:11). We are not unaware that a strain may be put on family ties. We do not doubt that the willful and deliberate advocacy of certain things over the protest of humble brethren in 1889 presented a difficult situation. We do not question the decision as to how to meet the problem. We do not deny that if we had been present we would probably have agreed to the action. We freely admit that for years we implemented the decision in our own conduct toward others, but this does not make it right. We believe that even though we acted sincerely we worked against the interest of peace and unity.

The policy of those opposed to innovations as stated at Sand Creek was that when those who were “guilty of teaching, or allowing and practicing the many innovations and corruptions” had been admonished and given sufficient time for reflection, “if they do not turn away from such abominations, that we can not and will not regard them as brethren.” This is the equivalent of declaring that at a certain time to be determined by human judgment those who did not conform to

the written ultimatum would be disinherited from the family of God and no longer recognized as His children. To those who protest that this is a forced interpretation it only needs to be pointed out that one would certainly regard as his brothers all who were children of the same father as himself. The statement, "We will not regard them as brethren" is equivalent to saying, "We will not regard them as God's children."

We know that defenders of our traditional position declare that the cause of Christ was saved by the forthright action of our fathers in the dying decades of the nineteenth century. They believe that the drastic steps taken then preserved "the faithful brotherhood." But an unbiased investigation will show that we now have as many "brotherhoods" as we have factions. One who reads the reports in partisan journals will soon learn that "News of the Brotherhood" contains reports only from the limited number who conform to the partisan concepts of the editor. One who learns better is hounded from "the brotherhood" although he is generally received with open arms as a *convert* into another "brotherhood." This is the natural fruit borne by the philosophy adopted by Daniel Sommer and David Lipscomb, which, because of their influence became the official and orthodox policy of the "The Church of Christ." Stripped bare of all extraneous matters it is a philosophy of brotherhood based on conformity of opinion, a relationship that is extended only until others deem that one has had "sufficient time for reflection." It is brotherhood based on the calendar – or clock!

## Alternatives

Our problem is augmented because this philosophy sees only two alternatives. It is either accept the innovations which become the pets of men, or no longer accept such men as brethren while they hug their pets to their bosoms. But this is an incorrect assumption. There is another alternative. One may continue to regard men as his brothers while steadfastly refusing to condone or sanction what his heart cannot regard as right or proper. We believe this is the scriptural course. Certainly the first is untenable for we cannot expect that men will endorse that which they believe to be wrong. We think that the second has proven itself to be injudicious and unworkable for it has left a sordid trail of division and has brought the restoration movement itself into disrepute. The first is based on compromise, the second on dogmatism, but the third is the way of love and thus the only way of genuine brotherhood!

4. We believe that our approach to the problem of securing and maintaining purity in doctrine has been factional in nature. This will be denied by hundreds and thousands who have so long defended that policy it will be difficult for them to ever admit they were in error. But the advocacy of any system which proposes to divide God's people into various camps, cliques, splinters and segments, is certainly factional in its working. The truth is that God has not offered division among brethren as a possible solution to problems facing those brethren. The Sand Creek Declaration was written for the specific purpose of recommending separation of a formal nature. The very language used to justify it proves what we allege. Referring to attitudes ten years preceding it is said, "It was then thought by the brethren generally that some other solution than a formal division could be reached." Again it is said, "We have from the first agitation of this subject...endeavored to find some other solution than a formal separation."

The context of these remarks proves that the document was an attempted solution by "formal division" or "formal separation." This could mean nothing other than that from this time on the brethren who had labored and worshiped together would be divided and separated from each other.

Now if formal division or separation is authorized by the Father as a means of settling problems in His family the document was justified. But a careful examination of the scriptures will reveal that it is not so. Jude, in his condemnation of those who “walk after their own ungodly lusts” writes: “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (verse 19). The RSV translates the passage, “It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.”

Formal division must always create at least two parties of those who have been one. In the type of case before us these will be rival parties. Yet Galatians 5:19-20 affirms, “Now the deeds of the flesh are quite obvious, such as...dissension, jealousy, temper, rivalry, factions, party spirit...and the like” (James Moffatt). “Anyone can see the kind of behavior that belongs to the lower nature... quarrels, a contentious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, party intrigues, jealousies...and the like” (New English Bible). Few of us would dare deny that those on both sides of the feuds in the previous century were affected by one or more of these works of the flesh. Jesus Christ has nowhere authorized his disciples to formally separate from each other. He has repeatedly urged them to attain unto harmony. “Fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another, the same turn of mind, and a common care for unity. Rivalry and personal vanity should have no place among you” (Phil. 2:23).

To those who live in congregations which tolerate false teaching, there is not one single admonition to divide or separate and create rival parties in the same community. Instead Jesus says, “Those who do not accept this teaching and have had no experience of what they like to call the deep secrets of Satan; on you I will impose no further burden. Only hold fast to what you have until I come. To him who is victorious, to him who perseveres in doing my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations” (Rev. 3:24-26). To those who are in a congregation that is pronounced dead, and one which has never completed a single thing it started out to do, there is not a hint of division or separation. Instead the few who are worthy and deserving are promised that He will receive them (Rev. 3:3, 4). To a congregation that has divided although they still meet in the same location, the admonition was not to continue in formal separation, but to cease it. “Mend your ways, take our appeal to heart, agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

## **Opposing Considerations**

Against this reasoning, those who are advocates of the factional approach to purity of doctrine, urge the words of Jesus, “You must not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a young wife against her mother-in-law, and a man will find his enemies under his own roof” (Matt. 10:34-36). If this means that Jesus came to create division among believers, and to urge brethren to set each other at naught, then his mission is wholly irreconcilable with his work and sayings. Whatever is involved in bringing a sword it refers to his mission on the earth. It was what he came to do.

In Matthew 7:9-11 the heavenly Father is favorably contrasted with physical fathers. “If you, then, bad as you are, know how to give your children what is good for them, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him!” It is inconceivable to me that a father while sitting at the table with his children would hand one of them a dagger or sword and encourage him to slay the others. On the night of his betrayal Jesus prayed that the believers might be one in

him so the world would believe that God had sent him. Surely he would not come for the express purpose of setting them against each other. Three times in one week after his resurrection he appeared to the disciples with the greeting, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, 21, 26). Does this not indicate that he came to bring peace to the disciples?

What did Jesus mean by the statement, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword...and a man will find his enemies under his own roof." The context shows that this was a part of his instructions to the twelve when he commissioned them to go to Jewish towns and villages with the announcement, "The reign of heaven is approaching." They were told, "Be on your guard, for men will hand you over to the courts, they will flog you in the synagogues, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, to testify before them and the heathen" (Matt. 10:17, 18). The intensity of the animosity is shown by the fact that "Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child, children will turn against their parents and send them to their death. All will hate you for your allegiance to me; but the man who holds out to the end will be saved" (Verses 21-22).

It is in this connection Jesus declares he did not come to bring peace to the earth. The nature of the message is such that it transcends all earthly ties and considerations. But the sword is not to be used by one brother in Christ against another such brother. Brethren are not to settle their difference as enemies under the same roof. The parting gift of Jesus to the disciples was not a sword with which to chop his body to bits. "Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish fears" (John 14:27). Jesus did not shed his blood that his followers should hack each other to pieces over individual cups, fermented wine, colleges and Bible classes!

Again, those who defend the factional approach as a solution to problems, quote James 3:17. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable." In their interpretation, purity is made to refer to doctrinal matters and is actually conformity to the norm of the party. The degree of purity which one possesses is determined by the intensity with which he opposes missionary societies, instrumental music, Bible classes, individual cups, unfermented wine, or other things of a controversial nature. Thus the standard for measuring purity differs with each faction. What is pure to one may be impure for another.

I recall that in one factional dispute some years ago between brothers in the Lord and in the flesh this passage was constantly quoted to justify separation and division. While all of us should strive to know Gods will and grow in grace and knowledge of the truth, I doubt that James had in mind any justification of the factional attitude. It may be interesting for you to read the comment which Albert Barnes makes on the passage.

**"It is true that a church should be pure in doctrinal belief, but that is not the truth taught here. It is not true that the scripture teaches, here or elsewhere, that purity of doctrine is to be preferred to a peaceful spirit; or that it always leads to a peaceful spirit; or that it is proper for professed Christians and Christian ministers to sacrifice, as is so often done, a peaceful spirit, in an attempt to preserve purity of doctrine. Most of the persecutions in the church have grown out of this maxim. This led to the establishment of the Inquisition, this kindled the fires of Smithfield; this inspired Laud and his friends; this has been the origin of no**

**small part of the schisms in the church. A pure spirit is the best promoter of peace, and will do more than anything else to secure the prevalence of truth.”**

Does not this passage imply that the first step toward real Christian character is a pure, or sincere heart? In the same context James contrasts the wisdom that is earthly and declares that it is the motivating factor in those who have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition *in your hearts* (verse 14). In verse 16 he says, “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” Then he continues, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity.” Do not all of these proceed from pure hearts that are purged of “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition?” Surely every congregation should be as pure in doctrine as possible and they need to make those alterations and changes which will help them to attain to greater purity, but to quote this verse as grounds for division among believers in Jesus seems to me to do a grave injustice to the sacred scriptures. We ought not to forget that the very next verse reads, “And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” But even God could not write a law which was a safeguard against the spirit of factionalism.

### **My Personal Position**

In the next issue I shall deal with the partisan tactics exhibited by those who introduced the “innovations” against which the Sand Creek Declaration was directed. The leaders forsook all semblance of brotherly love and deliberately sought by the arm of the civil law to take the property long held by those whose consciences forbade their sanction and adoption of certain things. This crystallized community and family feelings and doomed the restoration movement to an incessant civil war carried on by snipers and guerillas until this very generation. It was an ill advised move taken by those who proved beyond doubt that “the party spirit” is indeed a “work of the flesh.”

I am committed to the task of pleading for unity among the believers. I am convinced this can only be achieved by a restoration of the primitive order. This prompts me to oppose anything, in tendency or in fact, which will delay such restoration. I do not plead for unity regardless of restoration nor for restoration irrespective of unity. My plea is for unity based upon restoration of apostolic order and principle. This includes a restoration of the apostolic concept of brotherhood. It follows that I am not only opposed to those *things* which will obstruct restoration but I am also opposed to those *methods* which will destroy any hope of unity.

While I deplore the introduction of any innovation which seriously affects an attempt to restore the primitive order, I also decry any system devised to oppose such innovations which will forever banish the hope of securing unity in Christ Jesus. Those congregations representing the various divergent segments which call themselves “The Church of Christ” have adopted a philosophy of attempting to maintain doctrinal purity by separation, that is, by fractionizing and factionalizing the previously existing brotherhood. They have developed an unwritten creed of dogmatism. It is based on a theory of disciplinary action which may be designated *ex familia*, out of the family.

This method was contrived to meet the problems posed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Its application has now effectively reduced a glorious movement started to unite “the Christians in all the sects” into the most divided religious movement on the American scene. I revere the memory of men like Daniel Sommer and David Lipscomb, leaders in the North and South, but they

overstepped their human limitations when they proposed to unChristianize and depose from Gods family those who disagreed with them. Only the Father has a right to tell who should be regarded as brethren.

I want it known that I love God and I love every word in the sacred oracles. But I renounce the traditional twentieth century “Church of Christ” factionalism as a means for achieving Gods purpose in this age. I shall continue to oppose everything that I believe to be out of harmony with Gods plan but I shall not allow these things to interfere with my love or regard for any of my brothers who sincerely and conscientiously disagree with me about the implementation of that plan.

In short, I shall make nothing a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. I shall not seek to establish brotherhood by definition of a human document, nor by conformity in matters of opinion. I shall be a brother to all who have been begotten by my Father. Brotherhood based upon fatherhood, fraternity based upon paternity, this shall be my standard because it is scriptural. I will free myself from all partisan traditions, schemes and ideas which men have adopted to offset unity of the Spirit. I intend to be a free man in Christ, bound only by His word. “You are bought with a price, do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23).

The unity of the Spirit is one of community, not conformity; of diversity, not uniformity. It is rooted in mutual love, not dogmatism; in freedom, not in slavery. Our peace is a person, not a plan or a program!

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## Chapter 14

# A Muddled Movement

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

It was my good fortune recently to conduct a study in Odessa, Texas. This is a thriving city in the rich Permian Oil Basin. A few years ago it was a small western ranch town, but in two decades it has had a mushroom growth. It is just now becoming somewhat adjusted after a period of “growing pains.”

My purpose, however, is not to describe the region, but to point up a condition among those who are heirs of the nineteenth century restoration movement. Odessa presents a sad picture that is becoming typical of many regions. It illustrates graphically what happens when the party spirit invades the hearts of those who are the religious descendants of a movement inaugurated to unite all believers in our Lord Jesus, upon a common ground.

The disciple brotherhood is represented in Odessa by two groups, one of the instrumental, and the other the noninstrumental segment. Those who use the instrument in their public praise service, are in turn divided into three congregations, neither of which has any real fraternization with the others. The First Christian Church is allied with “The Disciples of Christ.” It is accused by the others of being a Liberal group. The other two, for want of better descriptive terms, and for purpose of distinction, could probably be labeled as Conservative and conservative Conservative, the degree being somewhat greater in the latter. I deplore labels among brethren, but it is difficult to write about such a situation without employing them.

There is no recognition of common ground or heritage upon the part of the noninstrument groups toward the aforementioned. One minister of the Christian Church told me he immersed a young man who later married a “Church of Christ girl.” Since the bride could not conscientiously attend with the husband, his preacher suggested to the latter to go with her. The husband was informed that “The Church of Christ” did not recognize “Christian Church baptism” so the man was forced to come forward and confess in the presence of “The Church of Christ” that he believed Jesus was the Christ, and God’s Son, whereupon he was immersed with “Church of Christ baptism.”

Another Christian Church preacher informed me of a consecrated young wife whom he immersed, but who later moved with her family to a nearby town, where she began to attend “The Church of Christ.” The minister of this congregation visited her and convinced her that since the Christian Church was a sect, they could not baptize for the remission of sins, so she made the confession once more and was immersed “according to the Bible.”

A preacher for “The Church of Christ” volunteered to me that he had a great burden upon his heart for the Conservative Christian Church preachers, and felt the time might come when many of them could be “converted.” I asked him if he regarded them as brethren, and he hastened to assure me he did not, and would as soon call on a Methodist or Baptist preacher to lead prayer, as to call upon one of them. I asked why, and he said it was because of the practice of instrumental music. Since brotherhood is the result of birth and common parentage, I concluded that to be a brother to these

men, one would need to be “born of the water and of the Spirit and of opposition to instrumental music.” And, while I am opposed to the latter, I have not been able to see how it negates brotherhood which is not based upon it, but upon a common Fatherhood.

However, it is among the noninstrument churches that the blighting influence of the party spirit is really rife. In Odessa there are at least five different segments or factions, most of which regard the others as *apostates*. Each looks upon its own party as being the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church of God on earth. There is a division into what is known as “Sunday School” and “anti-Sunday School” churches. These are again divided into “one cup” and “cups” churches. One is opposed to Bible classes but use individual containers to distribute the fruit of the vine to the communicants; the other opposes both classes and cups. Neither regards the other as in its “fellowship”; both brand and stigmatize each other as “unfaithful” and “disloyal,” each using its party prejudices as the criterion of faith and loyalty to the Lord Jesus.

As is usually the case, the “Sunday School churches” are the largest and most flourishing. They are in position to show some contempt for the “antis” as they label those who oppose classes. Each of the larger congregations has hired a pastor to minister to the flock, and in one instance, at least, there is an assistant minister, so that the “servant” in the first degree, has in turn a servant of the second degree, to assist him. Since these occupy a position identical with that held by the Christian Church pastors, except that the ones in “The Church of Christ” usually draw bigger salaries, the differences on that subject have been dropped by adoption, and the primary emphasis is on instrumental music.

A growing divergence is manifest among the noninstrument, individual cup, Sunday School, anti-missionary society churches, however. To all intents and purposes, another split is imminent, and in some places has already occurred with such vehemence as to fracture them into splinters, and rock “the brotherhood.” The occasion of the latest schism is the Herald of Truth radio and television program, and orphan homes existing as charitable societies. These diverse factions use as their principal propaganda organs the *Gospel Advocate* and *Gospel Guardian*, with those who claim to advocate the gospel also advocating these other things and those who claim to *guard* it, opposing them. The outstanding defender of Herald of Truth at Abilene, told me they did not “fellowship” the Guardian group at all!

Adherents of the *Guardian* position denominate the others as “Liberals” and are, in turn, denominated “Antis.” In conversation with two preachers of the latter faction, we learned there were three groups in this period of transition. These can be described as sound, shaky, and seditious. Both factions acknowledge the existence of the three, but each reverses the constituency. It is interesting to note that every party, instrumental and noninstrumental, has its “Liberals” and “Antis” depending upon the party test.

Among the instrumental groups, those who oppose the United Christian Missionary Society are “antis.” Among those who oppose it, those who decry the use of instruments are “antis.” In the *Gospel Advocate* faction those who oppose the orphan homes are “antis.” Among these, those who oppose Bible classes are “antis.” These regard those who oppose individual cups as “antis.” This chain reaction continues down to the final count, where no doubt the last person is “Antianti.”

The bigger fleas upon the dog,

Have smaller fleas that bite 'em;

And these, in turn, have lesser fleas,

And so on, *ad infinitum!*

Even the casual reader must recognize the fearful plight of those who are “the New Testament Church.” There is no prospect of improvement. The future holds out for these factions more strife, division and multiplication of self righteous partisanship. This is the fruit of carnality and spiritual immaturity, of legalism and unwritten creedalism, of pride and the party spirit. How can they unite the world in Christ, while carving His body into bits? It is time for those who can do so to rise above this wicked spirit and demonstrate a love that transcends all human walls and barriers, so its warmth may dispel the chilling frost of hate.

I taught in Odessa by invitation of a little group which, by choice and conviction, does not have classes or individual cups. They do possess a freedom which they extend to others in a manner which proves them to be true restorationists at heart. They recognize every consecrated immersed believer in the Sonship of Jesus of Nazareth as a brother in Him. They are capable of distinguishing between fellowship and endorsement, so they place brotherhood above “party lines.” Our studies together were unmarred by any untoward incident. We labored together in mutual love! My home was with J. T. Broseh and wife. He is a gospel preacher of ability. I feel very close to him and the little group of saints meeting at 30th and Golder Streets. I trust that all who love the Lord will pray that the twentieth century sectarian movement denominated “The Church of Christ” which grew out of a glorious nineteenth century restoration attempt, will return to its former purpose and intent.

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## Chapter 15

# The Authority Totem

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

The influence of this little journal now reaches far beyond the limits of the particular religious segment in which I grew up and I am deeply indebted to a kind providence which has lent wings to my words beyond their deserving. However, my concern for our immediate problems is in no sense lessened. As one broadens his acquaintanceship he need not forget those with whom he is more closely allied by choice and circumstances.

I have a deep sense of compassion for those of my brethren who are the constituency of the Churches of Christ. They are heirs of a movement which began as “a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects,” but they were fragmented into so many rival factions and warring tribes that any real witness attempted by them for unity is virtually negated among thinking people. Even the type of approach toward unity by most of them only serves to widen the existing chasms and create new cleavages.

The reason for this is quite understandable. Our brethren have a veil over their faces in the reading of God’s message and they cannot distinguish between the divine revelation and their own human interpretation. They confuse their deductions with his declarations and seek to bind all equally upon the hearts and consciences of those who are willing to be servants of God but are not willing to be slaves of men. Unless our brethren are transformed by the Spirit and renounce their false premise they are destined to become the most narrow and antagonistic sectarians of our age.

At the risk of becoming offensive when my only aim is to be objective, let me be as specific as possible. One of the mainline journals published in Texas in defense of Church of Christism has a very personable and well informed editor. He is, of course, as all such editors are, caught in a partisan trap which makes it essential for him to trim his sails according to the factional winds, and this means that he cannot keep a straight course but must steer by tacking from one week to another. Thus his editorials must veer from left to right and back again, as the passenger load shifts from one side to another.

This method may eventually land him, or a succeeding pilot, close to the goal, but it is a costly way to travel and makes for a lot of seasick voyagers who are going along for the ride. Recently our fellow editor has had to take note of other godly, sincere and consecrated brethren in the Lord who are heading for the same goal but who see no harm in using instrumental music in conjunction with their expression of praise unto the Father. How does he justify our fragmentation of God’s wonderful family over such an issue?

The answer is made over and over. “It is a question of the authority of God’s word.” It is just that simple. Our Texas editorial brother respects the authority of the Bible. Those who have instrumental music reject and despise that authority. They do not recognize the Lordship of Jesus over their lives. If they say that they do they are dishonest. If they did they would throw the instrument out, confess their sin for ever having thought it was justified, and then the loyal brethren

who have always respected the authority of the word would forgive and receive them, and we would all be one. Unity is that simple! It is just that easy!

Is it really? In order to keep you from becoming more confused I will designate the editor of whom I have been speaking as Editor Number One, for there is another paper published in Texas, and its editor also opposes instrumental music. But he is equally opposed to the support of Herald of Truth and orphan homes which Editor Number One endorses and defends. Editor Number Two says it is simply a matter of respect for the authority of God's Word, and that division between them is wholly unnecessary and caused by Number One.

All that Number One needs to do is to repent and renounce Herald of Truth and the institutions, and acknowledge his sin in once defending them and the loyal brethren who have stood for the truth will forgive him and receive him, and unity will follow as day follows night, or better, as night follows day!

In the meantime, Number One calls those who use instrumental music "liberals", and those who oppose Herald of Truth "antis." He brands the first as sectarian and the others as extremists. He calls them hobbyists. Number Two brands those who use instrumental music as "liberals" but he also labels the supporters of Number One as "liberals." He tries to put them in the same boat, but Number One refuses to allow this. He thinks that his is the only boat that has a ghost of a chance of making the crossing. Number Two laughs at this. He thinks that Number One is already on the rocks and doesn't know it!

### **The Beginning of Sorrows**

However, this is just the beginning of sorrows. There is another paper published in Texas by a genial and perceptive editor. He is opposed to instrumental music and Herald of Truth, but he is also opposed to Sunday Schools, of which Number Two is an ardent defender, even to the point of pushing and promoting the sale of literature to perpetuate the classes. Number Three says that it is simply a matter of respect for the authority of the word of God. He concludes that he reveres the Lordship of Jesus whereas Number Two rejects and denies it.

Number Three declares that unity is not a complicated matter at all. It can be achieved very easily. All that Number Two needs to do is to study the Bible without preconceived prejudice for classes, repent and renounce the classes, and send a letter to the loyal paper asking for forgiveness, and the faithful brethren who have remained sound on the issue will receive him, and together they can labor to help the world see the glorious majesty of the kingdom of heaven and the awful sin of having Sunday Schools.

As the situation now stands, Number Three regards Number One and Number Two as "liberals." He also regards those who use the instrument as "liberals" but he thinks that Number One and Number Two are more dangerous than those who use instruments because they are more nearly like the genuine, and the counterfeit dollar that is more nearly like the original will fool the most people. The genuine is represented by Number Three and the folks who oppose Sunday Schools. They are the real true Lord's church. Number One and Number Two are sectarian.

Number One and Number Two both agree on one thing and that is that Number Three is an “anti” and an extremist. He is a hobbyist and would rather oppose the Sunday School than to have peace. They both agree that he does not need to have a Sunday School to be accepted by them. All he needs to do is to keep still about the Sunday School they have and quit trying to proselyte their members by making it appear that the Sunday School is like the missionary society.

Do not become bored or aggravated with my little recital for there are at least two dozen of our factions, all of which deserve mention. Just to say there are twenty-five divisions in the non-instrument ranks doesn't impress us very much because we are all holed up and hibernating in our own monasteries and we never meet any of the others. Thus we can shrug them off as inhabitants of Never Never Land. But when we get right down to the nitty gritty of it, they are all here and must be reckoned with in all of the inglorious shadow which they cast over a once noble unity experiment. They are all alive and kicking – especially the latter!

So let's move along to Number Four who edits a paper in California. He opposes instrumental music, orphan homes and Sunday School classes, but he also opposes individual cups on the Lord's table, while Number Three endorses these. Number Four declares that Number Three is not sound in the faith. He has caused division and offences contrary to the doctrine. He must be marked and avoided. He says that peace can easily be restored. All that is required is for Number Three to begin respecting the authority of God's Word by renouncing individual cups and requesting forgiveness for his sin in countenancing their use. The prodigal simply needs to return to the Father's house and take up life again with his “elder brothers.”

Meanwhile, Number Four says that Number One, Number Two and Number Three are all “liberals.” But Number Three calls Number Four an “anti” and an extremist. The others do also but they are not “bugged” by him so much, because Number Three is between them and Number Four.

### **Not Funny!**

But this has gone far enough! If you don't get the point by adding two and two together, you'll not get it by tacking twenty more on. If you think all of this is funny, you are mistaken. There is nothing more shameful than to see the children of God split up into warring tribes, hacking away at each other with the sword of the Spirit, blunted though it may be by their rashness and ignorance.

What we have done is to carve out a restoration totem pole with a couple of dozen grotesque figures squatting on each other and representing the traditional image passed along to us by our factional forefathers who were just as wrong as they were sincere. We may have inherited their sincerity but we have also adopted their errors. Look up and down the entire pole and every party considers every other either sectarian or extremist.

A sectarian is one who has what we oppose; an extremist is one who opposes what we have. This is unvarying in its application. So here we are, all carved out of the same trunk, and every one of us is a sectarian to some, and an extremist to others. That is, all of us except the one on the top and the one on the bottom. There are no sectarians for the one on the top for no one has anything which he does not have. There are no extremists for the one on the bottom for he has nothing which anyone

would take time to oppose The one caught in the middle has an equal number of sectarians and extremists to bother with.

Let not Editor Number One flatter himself that he is better than the others because he is “nearer right” for this would be denied by every other one on the totem pole. He would be charged with being ultraliberal, for what he calls “nearer right” is what they tag as being more liberal. Besides this, the spirit which puts him where he is, is the same identical spirit which puts the rest of them where they are. The Church of Christ in Texas (or anywhere else) which denies fellowship on the basis of an honest opinion regarding instrumental music or the millennium is just as bigoted and intolerant in spirit as the lowest faction on the totem. It does not manifest itself in as many items but the sectarian spirit is not really a relation to things at all, but an attitude toward brethren.

And if Editor Number One were to be “converted” by Number Two he would automatically increase the number of things regarded as tests of fellowship, and decrease the number of those whom he regards as in it. Thus, fellowship has little to do with relationship to Jesus, but is regulated purely by the rationalization of human minds up and down the scale of all those controversial items dreamed up and drummed up by those who confuse being sticklers for opinions with standing for the Lord. In the final analysis this hinges fellowship on the mental meanderings of the most extreme and antisocial exclusivist.

## **Removing The Offense**

This crazy-quilt pattern results in absurd simplistic propositions for eliminating division. Editor Number One suggests that if those who use instrumental music love their brethren more than they do the instrument they should give it up and thus restore peace by removing the cause of offense. Since he has adopted the policy of peace by surrender of offending items, Editor Number Four now has a tool for effectively removing individual cups from every congregation in the land. Instead of debating the issue, which always intensifies the sectarian spirit, all he needs to do is to plant a brother in every “cups church,” as he comically and quaintly refers to them, and let these infiltrators demand that what the brethren preach on the instrument they practice on the cups. “What is sauce for the goose is applesauce for the gander.”

Seriously, though, what is our difficulty? It is not a question of attitude toward authority at all. Our brethren who keep parroting this moss-covered cliché should realize they are divisive. I know brethren who love Jesus as much as anyone on earth and they feel justified in using instrumental music, not because they do not study the Bible but because they do. The point is that they highly regard the authority of God but they just do not acknowledge the authority of Texas editors. And they can tell the difference! They insist on reading the scriptures for themselves. They acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus but not that of men.

Editor Number One does not regard Number Two as the supreme court and both reject Number Three from the same position How shall we extricate ourselves from our predicament? We can do it by refusing to play God with the consciences of other men. Not one of our petty divisive issues has one thing to do with fellowship in Christ. We are in that fellowship because we are called into it by God. We are children of God by the Spirit, and not citizens of a pro or con party on any of these matters.

Our brethren do not need to accept instrumental music, the premillennial interpretation, cups, classes or colleges. All they need to do is to accept brethren. But I am asked, "Shall we accept brethren in error?" Certainly so. There are no other kinds of brethren. No one knows it all. No one is infallible. If brethren accept you they will have to do it in spite of your error. You do not accept the error because you accept the brother, any more than you have to become cross-eyed because a brother in your physical family has such a defect.

And all of this talk about "full fellowship" is sheer poppycock. It is wholly without scriptural warrant and has been conjured up by little minds and dwarfed hearts. God has no stepchildren so we can have no half brothers. If we are in his family we are in it wholly or not at all. The idea that you can be in partial fellowship is like loving the right side of your wife and hating the left side. You cannot parcel God out and you cannot carve up his spiritual offspring either.

I have some brothers who use instrumental music and some who deplore its use. I have some brethren who think Jesus will precede the millennium and others who think the millennium will precede Jesus. I have some brethren who support Herald of Truth and never look at it, and others who never support it and always look at it. I have some brothers who attend where there are Sunday Schools and others who could not be dragged to such a place. I have brethren who pass a container of wine to every person, and others who pass every person a container of wine.

They are all my brothers, not because we share the same opinion but because we share the same Father. I was not begotten by a class nor born of a glass, and no position on either will ever affect my relationship in the wonderful family of God. Nothing will ever blot out for me the cross which makes us one, not even if it is as big as a pipe organ or as little as a "communion cup." I have a deep sense of compassion for those who are trapped in ridiculous factional positions. I know exactly how they feel. I know their inconsistencies, their vain professions and their empty protestations. And I pray for all of them to be delivered from the dead albatross draped about their partisan necks.

### **A Wrong Test**

We can never offer anything tangible to a world hungry for peace and serenity so long as we think that because men differ with us over music or the millennium, cups or classes, that they are disowned by the Father. Our fathers were wrong when they made the deductions of men on music a test of fellowship. I do not care how honest and earnest they were – they were wrong!

And I was wrong when I followed their factional spirit and made tests of union and communion out of opinions about music, homes, colleges, and all of the rest of that motley horde of things which we turned into devil's wedges to splinter and divide the royal family into which we were adopted through grace. No man is wrong when he speaks out against that which he cannot condone in the family, but that man sins who destroys the family ties over matters of difference.

I refuse to continue in the wrongs of yesteryear and perpetuate the consummate folly of factionalism. I refuse to project the arrogant and silly position that we have a corner on "respect for the authority of the scriptures." I regard all of "our" editors in California and Florida as my brothers. I love all those who squat on our totem pole, even those who detest one another as brethren in error. But I go further than that – much further. I receive and accept as my brothers and

sisters all those upon this whole wide earth whom God regards as his children. It is not their attitude toward a restoration totem pole that makes the difference, but their attitude toward the blessed cross of Calvary. We carved out the totem pole but God drove the cross into the earth. I have brethren on earth who never heard of Alexander Campbell or Barton Warren Stone. So long as they come to Christ they need not come by any group of men. We are saved by the grace of God and not by the favor of the "Church of Christ."

Let us have done with the silly bickering which has negated our influence and made us the laughingstock of serious people in our generation. Let's remove the stigma of schism which manifests itself in six or seven divisions in some cities, with brethren hurling thunderbolts of wrath and indignation at one another over the air waves. Shall we perpetuate our shame and glory in it? I thank God that our younger men and women are seeing a vision that their fathers have not caught. It is with these that the hope of our future lies. They are sick of the rehashing of the outworn arguments and the dishing out of slanted interpretations which are dishonest and irrelevant.

I pray that our brethren will sing out for freedom and speak up for liberty in Christ Jesus. We can no longer be held down and held back by skeletal hands reaching out of partisan sepulchers. Do we esteem the praise of men in our own little segments as of more value than the praise of God? The fact is that the kingdom of heaven is greater than any of our factions or all of them put together. Let us find the way to unity of the Spirit by rising above the smoking ashes of our hopes, slain and burned by our unwritten creeds.

It is time for a new day to dawn. We have led in dividing, now let us lead in uniting. We have walked the dreary path of strife and left it strewn with the bloody corpses of our slain hopes, now let us resurrect the ideals which gave us birth and unfurl the flag of peace as the rallying standard for the Christians in all the sects. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of our salvation! It is for such a time as this that we have come to the Kingdom. Let us not fail!

(*Mission Messenger*: Vol. 29, No. 8; Oct. 1967. This was also circulated as a tract without the author's name.)

Chapter 16

# The Party Spirit

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

**“Now the works of the flesh are plain...strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit....I warn you, as I warned you before that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21).**

The party spirit is a work of the flesh. It is here listed with other things which will debar from heaven. This alone should cause us to examine ourselves to see if we are free from its blight. We earnestly desire an entrance into the everlasting kingdom. We must be willing to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. But the party spirit is very deceptive. Those who boast the loudest about their freedom from it are often the tragic victims of its poison. How can we know if we are beset by it? We suggest a few indications of its presence.

## Symptoms of Party Spirit

1. *A reluctance to admit the truths held by others.* Truth is truth, regardless of who holds it. The partisan is afraid to acknowledge truth held by those outside of his group for fear it will reflect favorably upon them. If he does admit truth on the part of another, he must hasten to speak deprecatingly of the person or some other position he holds. If someone remarks that Billy Graham certainly spoke the truth in his fight against evil in a radio address, the partisan replies, “Yes, but look at all the money he gets for doing it.” If questioned as to how much Graham gets for his radio service, the partisan cannot tell you. He does not know, but he seeks to offset the fact that truth was spoken by creating suspicion against the man and his motives. No one in the group to which the partisan belongs ever preaches for money, but every person who is a member of another religious party and who speaks any truth, does so insincerely, because he knows better, and his sole object is to inflate his pride and secure filthy lucre.
2. *Inability to rejoice over the good done by others.* It seems that some would rather see men left to wallow in misery than to see others credited with helping them. They “pass by on the other side” and then revile the “Samaritans” who stop and relieve the wounded and desolate. Recently I was in a town where the local Christian Church preacher had made numerous trips to the home of a drunkard to read the scriptures and talk to the man about his soul. Eventually he had immersed that man who straightened up his life and gave evidence of making a good husband and father. I took occasion to express my gratitude for such an accomplishment in the home of one of the brethren. He scoffingly said, “They cross land and sea to make one proselyte, and then make him twice as much a child of hell as themselves.” I am opposed to instrumental music in the public praise service of the congregation, but I trust I never get so little that I would rather a man would stay in a drunken stupor, or kick and beat his wife and children, than to be led to faith in the Christ by someone who differs with me on instrumental music. I’m opposed to Roman Catholicism but I rejoice at every leper whose path on earth is made freer from pain by the ministrations of the Catholic nurses in a leper colony.

3. *Unwillingness to hear both sides of an issue.* The Catholic sect seeks to maintain its narrow exclusiveness by refusing to permit its members to read anything which conflicts with its tradition. The clergy can read what they please, but laymen are not allowed to do so. Yet, at Paragould, Arkansas, a clergyman in "The Church of Christ" stood in the pulpit and advised his parishioners to mail back copies of "Bible Talk" and MISSION MESSENGER without reading them, although he reads them all the time. I know a preacher who cancelled his subscription to one of these journals with a letter consisting of a tirade against the publisher, yet he can hardly wait until he gets his hands on the paper when it comes to a home where he is staying. He just wants to be "in the clear" when he is questioned, so he can say, "I do not subscribe for his paper." Free men in Christ are not afraid to read anything, go anywhere, or hear anyone. Party men must stay in good with the party or be given a Russian purge.
4. *A tendency to abandon the search for truth and rest satisfied.* I asked a brother how the cause of restoration was progressing in a certain area, and he told me it was not progressing – they had already arrived! All of the debris of sixteen hundred years of the dark ages had been fully swept away. There was nothing left to learn, no new discoveries to be made. All that was necessary was to parrot the same sermon outlines, misapply the scriptures in the same fashion, defend the same fallacies in reasoning; mistake the same customs and traditions for God's word, and stir up the same false emotions in the congregation toward others. Every reformation in history ended in another sect; every such sect proclaims that it has arrived in Jerusalem and persecutes those who call upon it to rouse up and keep marching onward and upward. There is nothing which bothers a sect more than to be around one who refuses to be made a sectarian. No partisan is ever at ease in the presence of one who is unwilling to allow the God of the universe to become a tribal deity or local divinity. A real partisan does not seek for new truths. He does not need to do so. His party has ascended to the highest peak of spiritual attainment. There is nothing beyond to challenge his thinking or stimulate his intellect. There is nothing ahead but stagnation and decay!

### **Effects of Party Spirit**

1. It breeds inconsistency. There is not a congregation existing in which all of the members are agreed. In many, the arguments are frequent over marriage and divorce, relation to civil government, our obligation to nonmembers, etc. In all of these, despite these differences, the members recognize and call upon each other for prayer. Sometimes one is called upon to participate whose moral life has been a disgrace and whose conduct has been a constant source of trouble. He is a member of the party. But let one come in who has been a shining light in the community who has lived a life of consecration, and he is given the deep freeze treatment, because he does not share with those present in their view upon some point of doctrine. He may be mild, inoffensive, and possessed of a sincere desire to know the truth, and may be doing the best he can in the light of his present knowledge, but he does not yet know the party pass word, so he is a pagan.
2. It shrivels the souls of men. The humanitarian love of God which should expand our souls and cause us to grow in grace withers under the chilling frost of the party spirit. In a certain community a prominent citizen died, and the grief stricken members of his family asked the local Church of Christ for permission to conduct the funeral service in their meetinghouse.

They were refused on the ground that they were not using one of “our preachers” and the brethren were afraid of “bidding Godspeed” to one who brought not this doctrine.

In another place the Red Cross asked permission to set up an emergency food kitchen in a meetinghouse to serve disaster victims. They were turned down because the brethren did not endorse the Red Cross and did not believe in having a kitchen in the church building. When the Methodist people offered their building, the members of the Church of Christ got in line and marched in to get their plates filled. Their bellies were not partisan; it was just their hearts.

3. It destroys the sense of proper spiritual values. The party spirit, in opposition to the Spirit of Christ, always demands “sacrifice instead of mercy.” In many places a man will be tolerated regardless of his life if he is sound on the party test. In one of the most intolerant and bitter factions of the disciple brotherhood, a number of the preachers have been loose in morals, but their straying from the path of virtue is whitewashed because they are adept at defending the party line. Some of the most bigoted, haughty attackers of “the sects” have personal records which will not bear too close inspection. Some are careful and scrupulous about the Lord’s Supper. The bread has to be prepared a certain way, it has to be broken just so, and passed to the audience in a certain manner. But some who are so zealous about these things often indulge in profanity and other wickedness. The murderers of Jesus would not enter the judgment hall “lest they be defiled and not be fit to eat the Passover.” They did not scruple to kill the Son of God, but they must be careful not to be ceremonially defiled.
4. It produces legalistic extremes. The members of each party regard that party as the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church of God upon earth. In some cities there are six different “Churches of Christ” each claiming to be the “only faithful church.” The members of one hardly dare speak to the members of another. If one rises above the narrow confines of his unwritten creed and visits another to discuss with him points of difference, he at once becomes a subject of comment and censure. “When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?’” If the apostle Paul were here today, he would not long be allowed to remain in a single faction of the disciple brotherhood. He would be talked about, criticized, and soon excluded from any of them now existing. Paul spent his life in opposing the attempt to bind anything upon men as a basis of fellowship except faith in God’s Son, as the Messiah. He was under constant fire from the circumcision party in the church, whose members insisted upon laying another foundation. Recently a preacher announced as his sermon topic, “Where Would Paul Attend Church in This City?” I told him it would not make much difference, because they would soon withdraw from him, wherever he went.

The party spirit will keep us out of heaven. All of us have been tintured with it. It is a passion of the flesh. We should try to overcome it. We need elders today who will cultivate in their flock a breadth of vision, a charitable spirit, a love for fallen humanity, and a sense of the need of reformation. It is with the bishops that the future of the church of God actually rests. We must all revere God’s revelation, refuse to compromise truth, and cling to the word of God as the sheet anchor of our liberty. But we do not need to be dogmatic, arbitrary and hateful. It requires no sacrifice of principle to make allowance for honest mistakes, early religious environment, or lack of proper education. We do not forfeit truth when we make a distinction between those who

knowingly and deliberately disobey Christ, and those who obey him to the best of their present knowledge, even though it is faulty and imperfect.

Just here a word of caution may be necessary. We should guard against unwise generalizations. It is easy to say there is no excuse for a person not seeing all of the truth since he has access to the Bible. But more is required than mere possession of the Book. A man who inherits a rich farm which was long since cleared from the wilderness may conclude that the poor man across the road with a hundred acres ought to be as well off as himself. But he may overlook the fact that the other has to dig sprouts, cut down timber and clear away undergrowth before he can plant his grain. Let those who have been more fortunate in inheriting truth discovered by others, exercise charity toward those who are still laboring to discover what we have. Let us not try to bind God with the law which He gave to bind us. It is better to use the truth we have in charitably helping those who struggle upwards than to use it to repel and drive them away.

(*Mission Messenger*; March 1958; Book: Thoughts on Fellowship)

## Chapter 17

# The Bed of Procrustes

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

Procrustes was the ancient champion of enforced conformity. In Greek antiquity he was a legendary highwayman who lived in Attica. He had an iron bed which he regarded as the standard of length. Because it just fit him, he concluded that every one should fit it. He stopped every traveler and tied him to the bed. If the person happened to be too short, Procrustes stretched him until he attained the correct length; if he happened to be too long, his legs were cut off until he met the proper requirement. Thus was everyone made identical in size.

The iron bed on the highway of Attica has been supplanted by one on “the highway of holiness.” It operates now in the field of religion, rather than in the physical realm. It is used to measure spiritual attainment, and is the test of partisan fellowship. Every faction has its own bed, and all who would sojourn among them must be expanded or contracted, distended or diminished, enlarged or compressed, according to the unwritten creed which forms the bond of union for the particular group. Each of these claims to be the one holy, apostolic, and catholic church of God on earth, a contention they make in common with the Roman Church. Yet each has a different criterion of “faithfulness” or “loyalty” than all the others, and “the root of bitterness” in each case is the standard around which the partisans rally.

It is a figment of imagination that we must all think alike on every point of interpretation, or that we must be united in all our opinions and differences, before we can be one in Christ. Our minds differ even as do our faces. We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. No two of us have identical abilities, capabilities, or responsibilities. Any system of religion based upon uniformity of knowledge, or conformity in opinion, at any given time, is doomed to division and failure. It is a humanly devised, not a divine system. The very ones who demand absolute agreement in order to fellowship disagree with each other. There are no two people in the church of God today, or in any faction which arrogantly assumes it is the church, who see everything exactly alike, so if fellowship is conditioned upon agreement or endorsement, there will be no fellowship. Recognition of this very thing causes each party to settle on some point of doctrine, and arbitrarily demand conformity on that particular. It is as if these modern Procrustians have agreed to accept all whose noses measure exactly three inches in length, regardless of their many deviations otherwise.

Take eight members of the same family, and feed them upon exactly the same food, and there will be variations among them. One will be fair, another dark; one light, another heavy; one short, another tall. What produces these variations? It cannot be their parentage for all have the same father and mother. It cannot be their diet, for all eat the same thing. In the physical realm we are not worried about differences. We regard them as natural and normal. We would think it odd if we could not tell the eight apart. In spite of their differences in appearance all have much in common. They are all part of one family. We would not think of dispossessing one who had a physical defect.

The same God who made our bodies created our intellects. His revelation constantly emphasizes we are not alike. This is the very essence of the parable of the sower, of the talents, and of the pounds. We not only have “gifts differing” but we have mental capacities differing as well. We have the same spiritual father and mother, we feed on the same spiritual food, but we do not all think alike. The inner man has its individuality the same as the outer man. We are not an indeterminate, indistinguishable mass in the spirit. If men thought alike in all matters there would be no inventions, industries, discoveries, progress, development, or even life. Why do we think it a matter of worry and concern when God’s children do not all agree in opinion? Why must we devise Procrustean beds to elongate or abbreviate them to conform to our partisan norms? This is the basis of all sectism!

Much of our present predicament stems from ignorance of the real teaching of God’s word. It is thought that fellowship and unity are contingent upon perfect knowledge and conformity of thought. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are in fellowship with God, but surely we do not know as much as God knows, nor are our lives as perfect as His existence. If God deigns to fellowship us in our imperfections and shortcomings, who are we to set up a different standard for our fellows? Are we not like the unjust debtor who, having been forgiven so great an amount, try to throttle one of our fellow servants and make him pay us a negligible amount?

### **Speak The Same Thing**

But does not the apostle command that we “all speak the same thing”? Certainly he does. But an examination of the context will show that he was dealing with the schisms in Corinth. One was saying, “I am of Paul”; another, “I am of Apollos”; another, “I am of Cephas”; another, “I am of Christ.” That is what they were saying. Paul told them to speak the same thing, that is, to stop their party cries. He did not mean for them to parrot the same words! They were not all to be like the tape recordings which start when you dial the wrong number on your telephone. Men are not recorded robots. The only way all could speak the same thing about all things at the same time, would be for all to know all things about the same things at the same time. Not even the preachers who postulate fellowship on absolute conformity will affirm that such is now the case, for they are constantly traveling about trying to teach all about some things, and they know there will always be some who will not know all things – including themselves!

God has not established the divine fellowship on the basis of the amount of acquired knowledge of his revelation, nor upon reasoning, opinion, or interpretation, but upon faith! This is the majesty and glory of the Christian system. It takes sinful men who need a Saviour and brings them into proper relationship with God in spite of varied degrees of knowledge, divergences of opinion or interpretation, or vagaries of reason. It employs none of these as the foundation of the Christian hope. It substitutes fact for opinions, and demands faith in the testimony of credible witnesses as to these facts. And because many frail, ignorant, helpless victims of sin, denied the opportunities for intellectual training, but still loved by God, He conditions His requirements to their state. He makes salvation and entrance into fellowship contingent upon the belief of just one fact, validated by obedience to just one act. Faith and obedience! These are the requirements in all ages. And because of the simplicity of the Christian system, the most erudite philosopher must enter the fellowship on the same basis as the jungle pygmy.

Every sincere believer in the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Messiah and Son, who is immersed in water upon the basis of that faith, is God's child, and my brother. He is in my fellowship, because fellowship is the state or condition into which we are introduced by the new birth. There are variations among God's children as there are among mine. We should cease to regard such as abnormal. A person is not necessarily a freak because he does not look like me; and by the same token he is not a freak if he does not think as I do on all things.

Wherein we differ, let us reason together as brethren, not cleave the skulls of each other as enemies. Unity of opinion is a goal to strive for, not an essential to fellowship. We come into fellowship first and then study to see things alike; we dare not reverse the divine process and insist that we all see everything alike before we can come into fellowship! If we come closer to each other it will only be because of a mutual regard for Jesus as a perfect model for us all. We will gain nothing by setting up our iron bedsteads on the highway.

*(Mission Messenger: July 1960; Book: Covenants of God)*

## Chapter 18

# Our Costliest Sin: Exclusivism

*Leroy Garrett*

All sin is costly. It robs us of health, peace, and happiness. It destroys churches, homes, businesses by wrecking relationships. Above all it separates us from God, and so we are assured by scripture that *the wages of sin is death*. Many are “dead” even while they live, and this is because of sin.

The great power of sin is its deceitfulness. We are hooked by it before we realize what has happened. Satan has always used tricks and cunning to do us in, and so Eph. 6:11 teaches us how to arm ourselves against “the wiles of the devil.” This means that Satan is fraudulent. We think we are getting gold but it turns out to be all alloy; he invites us to a banquet, but only to poison us. It is noteworthy that Heb. 3:13 urges us to exhort one another each day lest we be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

We do not like to think of Christians becoming *hardened*, and most of us would insist that this has not happened to us, but this shows what sin, *deceitful* sin, can do. Sin can and does close our minds to new ideas and our hearts to new relationships and experiences. And Satan tricks us into supposing that our “hardness of heart” is loyalty to the old paths and our closed minds is soundness in the faith.

And so the sin of exclusivism has a halo of righteousness, and if anyone dares to remove the halo by questioning our separatist ways we brand him with some epithet, such as *liberal*. So this time around I thought it would be helpful to point out what this sin is costing us and not simply condemn it for the sin that it is. Once we see its high price tag we might be led to abandon it.

But let us make sure we agree on what we mean by exclusivism, and in this context I am referring especially to those of us in the Churches of Christ. When James DeForest Murch wrote his *Christians Only*, a history of the Restoration Movement, he gave descriptions of each of the three churches of the Movement. He called the Disciples of Christ, the left wing, “nonBiblical unionists.” The Christian Churches, the centrists, he labeled “Biblical inclusivists.” The Churches of Christ, whom he identified as the right wing, he called “Biblical exclusivists.”

You may not like labels, but brother Murch (now deceased) was more right than wrong in his descriptions, at least in reference to Churches of Christ. We are biblicists and we are exclusivists. The first means we have an authoritative view towards the Bible and the second means that we suppose ourselves to be *the* church, excluding all others. If brother Murch missed it, it would be that there is a lot of overlapping in his categories. For instance, a lot of folk in the Christian Churches are exclusivists too, and some Disciples are biblicists, and they are not always unionists. But *generally* speaking we may have to allow for Murch’s categories.

So the sin of exclusivism is the arrogant assumption that we are right and everybody else is wrong, that we are the only Christians. If we allow that there are “Christians among the sects,” an admission that often comes hard, then they are to leave the sects and join us, for we are not a sect. We are the Church of Christ, the only church there is, and the answer to a divided church is for all others to

become like us. This is exclusivism plainly stated. We often use veiled language, hiding the grosser aspects of our claim, such as the term “the Lord’s people,” which would ordinarily be understood to apply to the church universal, though we apply it to ourselves alone.

Here is the price we pay for this sin:

1. *It gives us a distorted view of brotherhood and denies us joyous fellowship with other of God’s children.*

If the only sisters and brothers I have are those in Churches of Christ, then I am much poorer than I think. I rejoice that the great host of “the spirits of just men made perfect” in heaven and the family of God on earth are my blood brothers in the Lord, and that I can enjoy fellowship with them all, both in this world and in the world to come. Since I gave up the proud sin of separatism I have found beautiful brothers and sisters everywhere, and what a blessing that is. This *ism* that Satan would hang on us denies us of one of heaven’s greatest gifts, community life with all those that bear the likeness of Jesus. While God sent Jesus to make us brothers, this vicious *ism* separates God’s people and causes them to treat each other as strangers or enemies instead of blood kin. It causes us to accept a sister because she belongs to the right party rather than to the right Person.

2. *It destroys the cooperative work of the church catholic.*

Satan really sold us a bill of goods when we bought the old line that because we do not endorse all that people believe and practice we can therefore have nothing to do with them. We are not even to attend other churches, except perhaps for weddings and funerals, for we would be “fellowshipping” their error. But it does not work the other way, for we expect others to come to us. Being *so* right creates strange logic. We read translations prepared by the denominations, we sing their songs and study their commentaries, and even use their seminaries to train our college professors and ministers and their mission language schools to prepare our missionaries. But still we cannot “fellowship” them!

This journal’s theme for 1980 is *With All Your Mind*, one purpose of which is to free the mind of those crippling fallacies that rob us of so many rich blessings. Here is one of those fallacies, known as the fallacy of division: *Because we cannot work with people in everything we therefore cannot work with them in anything.* The first part may be true of us all, but the *therefore* does not follow, for there are some areas in which all believers can work together, such as distributing Bibles, feeding the hungry, and fighting injustices. But the sin of exclusivism cripples all such efforts, separating us from the church catholic.

3. *It makes a mockery of our plea for unity.*

Mark it well as a fact we must face: *a church that preaches unity and yet separates itself from all other Christians is not truly a unity church.* How do we expect anyone to take seriously anything we say about unity when we won’t have anything to do with him? We cry *Unity!* to each other within our own churches, but we never reach out to others in any kind of unity effort. What kind of unity plea is that? We say we believe in unity, and yet we cannot even share with others in a Thanksgiving service. An exclusivist can no more be a unitist than a hermit can be a crusader. Let us face the bitter truth: we are not a unity people, and we are doing *nothing* for the sake of a united Church of

God upon earth. *Nothing!* That will continue to be the case until we quit sinning, the sin of making all other of God's children *untouchables*.

4. *It turns missions into petty sectarianism.*

I visited recently with a brother who spent 20 years as a Church of Christ missionary in the Orient. He explained that his strategy was to "convert" those already reached by the Presbyterians and others. Now that he has a different view of the matter, he told me with tears in his eyes how he drove a wedge between humble Orientals and their missionary pastor, even to the building of a separate chapel across the road, dividing believers in Jesus in a pagan land. He broke as he cried out to me, "Leroy, that dear man had been laboring for 30 years among those people and I destroyed his work in a matter of months!" He had me in tears as well.

How tragic that we must export our Texas-Tennessee sectarianism into India and Thailand. We need to examine our ethics when we will draw upon others for missionary knowledge and language study, and *then* go where their missionaries go, not to work with them in reaching the heathen, but to work against them by proselyting their converts. Exclusivism makes for strange morality as well as strange logic. While our missionary situation continues to be this way generally, we can rejoice that we have a growing number of missionaries who are true ecumenists, and this without surrendering any truth.

I am presently reading the story of Archibald McLean, who was the guiding force in our Foreign Missionary Society, which was founded in 1875, well before the Churches of Christ became a separate church in the Restoration Movement. What a passion he had for souls! He recruited preachers, prepared them, and sent them all over the world. Then he visited all the mission stations, sending reports to the papers back home, which made fascinating reading. He always visited all the missionaries, of whatever denomination, praying with them and encouraging them. He lived a very simple, almost monastic, life in order to send as much money as possible to China or wherever, and he prayed for every missionary by name every day.

I was touched by his visit to Hawaii, where Congregational missionaries had taken the story of Jesus a century before our men were ever there, and with great hardship and sacrifice. McLean not only visited the mission station of these people, but went to the cemetery where the old missionaries of yesteryear lay sleeping, men who had invaded the strongholds of heathendom and turned thousands to the cross of Jesus, helping to make Hawaii what it is today. McLean stood in reverence at their grave, men who died away from home for Jesus' sake, and with hat in hand he thanked God for their sacrificial lives.

And yet McLean surrendered not one truth. A few pages later we find him in India, baptizing converts with his own hands and according to his own understanding. He was a magnanimous man made free by the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that the way you want the Church of Christ to be today? We can overcome the sin of exclusivism by looking to Jesus rather than to the party. The way out is for you and me to take the lead. The old Chinese brother had something when he prayed, "Lord, reform your church – *beginning with me!*"

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 22, No. 4; April 1980)

## Chapter 19

# Restoration or Reformation

*Leroy Garrett*

For years we have been calling this series *restoration* history, but it may be time to question the integrity of that term. The more I study our history the more convinced I am of the inappropriateness of the term *restoration*, which means I may eventually change the name not only of this feature of the journal but the name of the journal itself. I will explain what I mean.

There is in history a restoration movement, or several of them, but the movement launched by O'Kelly-Stone-Campbell was not one of them. Theirs was a *reformation*, which is what they called it (and themselves *reformers*), which is a concept quite different from restoration. Restorationism is a doctrine about the church that presumes that (1) the true church went out of existence; (2) the existing churches are false churches; (3) the primitive church as the ideal church is revealed in the New Testament on a "fixed pattern" basis; and (4) we are to "restore" that church and thus have the one true church.

There have been more than 400 restorationist groups, all claiming to be the true church. These all go back to the days of the Reformation under Luther and Calvin when some of their followers believed they were wrong in trying to reform the Roman Catholic Church. It cannot be reformed, their critics claimed, so they broke with the Reformation and started what has come to be known as "the radical reformation." These were the Anabaptists, but they soon divided into Mennonites, the Amish, etc. The Plymouth Brethren have their roots here, and they are today divided six or eight different ways. Restorationist groups always divide *again* and again and again, for restorationism by its very nature is divisive.

Reformation is entirely different. It accepts a less than perfect church as still the church, and it believes the church has always existed, just as Jesus said it would. But it has always been in need of reform, even from the beginning. No primitive church was perfect, and they all needed reformation, more or less. In his letters to the churches Paul was a *reformer*, not a restorationist. He did not want to junk the Corinthian church, believing it to be a false church. It was rather the Body of Christ, and he called it that and recognized it as such, even though it needed reformation. He did not tell the faithful to leave and start "a loyal church."

No congregation is perfect. If there was such, it would no longer be once you and I found out about it and joined it. No church in history has ever been all it should be, just as no person has ever been. Just as we are always to be reforming our lives, which is what *repentance* means, we are also to be reforming the church, which is always erroneous and imperfect to some degree. That is *reformation*. The restorationist, on the other hand, believes that he has restored the one true church, and this from the *pattern* set forth in scripture. All others have to be wrong. There can be no error or "brothers in error." And so such ones continually divide, for when some new "truth" is found in the pattern a "loyal church" starts for those who want *all* the truth. They usually debate each other as to whether the new interpretation is indeed "according to the pattern," or whether an "innovation" that has been introduced is authorized by the pattern.

Recent research by Prof. George Williams of Harvard reveals much about the character of these subgroups of the Reformation, who rejected the Reformation and became restorationists, believing that they had restored the true church. The historians call this “the restoration motif” or primitivism, and Prof. Williams says, “So widespread was restorationism (restitutionism) as the sixteenth century version of primitivism that it may be said to be one of the marks of the Radical Reformation.” He turned up books written on the restoration movement, the titles bearing that name.

Our pioneers did not believe that the church had apostatized to the point that it no longer existed, nor did they believe that their mission was to “restore” the true church. Their mission was rather to unite the Christians in all the sects. Those sects were not the church, to be sure, but God’s people were in those sects and they were the church. As reformers they sought to restore to the church (to be distinguished from restoring the church itself) the ancient order of things, including unity.

Here are a few examples of how they referred to their work as reformers.

### **Reformers**

When Robert Richardson wrote *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, a subtitle read: “A view of the Origin, Progress, and Principles of the Religious Reformation which he advocated.”

Barton W. Stone wrote about Alexander Campbell: “I am constrained, and willingly constrained to acknowledge him the greatest promoter of this reformation of any man living. The Lord reward him!” (Biography of Barton W. Stone, p. 76).

Concerning Walter Scott: “It is our melancholy task to record the death of one of the pioneers of the current Reformation.” (*Christian Pioneer*, 1861, p. 43).

On the mission of the pioneers: “The essential work of the current Reformation has been to uncover from the sectarian rubbish of ages this ‘precious corner stone’ (Jesus Christ)” (*Christian Pioneer*, 1861). Concerning the Brush Run church: “The oldest and most favored church in the Reformation” (*Mill. Harb.*, 1856, p. 57).

Isaac Errett in *Mill. Harb.* (1861) wrote a series of nine articles on the work they were doing, entitled “A Plea for Reformation,” in which he constantly described the work as “the reformation which we plead.”

Robert Richardson also did a series entitled “Reformation” that ran for 19 installments, detailing the plea of the pioneers. They start in the 1847 *Millennial Harbinger*.

Alexander Campbell also wrote a series on “Anecdotes, Incidents, and Facts Connected with the Origin and Progress of the Current Reformation.” (*Mill. Harb.*, 1848, p. 279).

Hundreds of letters appear in the *Millennial Harbinger* from preachers in the field, always under the title of “Progress of Reform.” T. M. Allen of Missouri wrote to Campbell more than any other, in almost every issue of the paper for 30 years. He would often refer to how he was “contending for Reformation.”

T. P. Haley in *The Christian Church in Missouri* (1888, p. 91) says: “It is proposed to record in this volume such incidents in the lives of the pioneer preachers of the current reformation in Missouri and the early history of the Church of Christ.”

Alexander Campbell writing Ovid Butler: “Your opinions are of deep import, involving much of the moral character and future destiny of this Reformation.” (*Mill. Harb.*, 1851, p. 431).

These are but a few of the thousands of references that could be given, showing that our pioneers thought in terms of *reformation*. They almost never used the word *restoration*, though it did occasionally appear. At least once Campbell used “reformation or restoration” as if they were synonyms to him, but this can hardly be deduced since he used the latter term so rarely. He used both terms in the title of the book: *The Christian System* “in reference to the union of Christians, and a restoration of primitive Christianity, as plead in the current reformation.”

He might speak of restoring primitive Christianity or “the ancient order” but never of restoring the church, for there is a vast difference, as we have seen. After mud and water injured the art museums of Florence, Italy, they might have referred to restoring pristine beauty to a Rembrandt, but not of restoring a Rembrandt (as if it did not exist).

It is significant that the heirs of the Stone-Campbell reformation movement almost never call it anything except the Restoration Movement. When we do this we place ourselves in the tradition of the Anabaptists and the radicals who suppose that they and they alone are the true church, and not within the reformed tradition where our pioneers placed themselves.

Reformers have less reason to divide just as they have more reason to be inclusivistic, for they accept the church’s fallibility even while they endeavor to make it perfect. They do not buy the fallacy that the scriptures provide a fixed pattern that provides the details for the work, worship and organization of the church. They see that even the New Testament churches were different from each other, and that if you sought to “restore the primitive church,” you would have to decide which church to restore. They rather see the scriptures as providing that norm for the church that enables us to do for our time what they did for theirs. They tolerate error and imperfection in that they realize that they have always been and always will be, but they labor to minimize the things that are wrong.

Restorationism, on the other hand, is the cause of all our divisions, for by its very nature it is exclusivistic. The Mormons are a good example of restorationists, being “the restored church of the latter day saints.” One verse in “the pattern” refers to being baptized for the dead. This is inflated into a major doctrine, and unless you accept their interpretation you cannot be a Mormon. There have been hundreds of such sects.

Its seeds are in every church. Prof. Williams says it was in the Reformation itself, especially in Calvin, and to the extent it gained dominance divisions came. It was in the Stone-Campbell Movement, but strong *reformation* leaders kept it at bay for generations, though it always troubled the Movement. Following the death of those leaders who insisted that we can have varying opinions and still be united, a new leadership emerged that was restorationist and exclusivistic. This led to a separate group by the 1890’s known as “the Churches of Christ.”

As a restorationist church, the Church of Christ has always been divisive, dividing once every ten years since its existence. It will continue to divide unless it surrenders its exclusivisticrestorationist view of the church and accepts the reformation view of its earliest pioneers, who never had the notion that they and they alone were the one true church. Since restorationists will have nothing to do with other churches, they can never be a unity people. As reformers we can reach out to others and make unity our business. We reform the church by building bridges of love and fellowship between all God's children.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 22, No. 4; April 1980)*

## Chapter 20

# A Boy Learns the Meaning of Brotherhood

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

I was not quite nine years old when I ran into my first real problem about brotherhood. And it all came about because of a gallon of coal oil – kerosene it is called in these days. If you have time, and are not too busy to listen, I would like to tell you about it.

At the time we lived in a little two-room miner's shack with a summer kitchen out back. It was typical of the houses in the sprawling village dominated by the mine tipple and the huge chat dump, that tailing pile left after the rock had been ground at the crushing mill and the ore extracted. There were three younger children besides me, and another on the way. Papa worked a thousand feet underground. Every day he went down on the cage, wearing his carbide lamp on his cap so he could see where to use his miner's pick to get to the vein of ore. Sometimes he worked the day shift, and at other times the evening or night shift. There was little time indeed to do things as a family since the work underground was ten hours per day and six days per week.

We children were thrust upon our own resources, and since the one next to me was a boy, we spent a good deal of time dreaming up games to play. When we got tired of playing we could always relieve the tedium and tension by fighting. Nothing else was quite as interesting as a good fight, and it was all the more fascinating because it was forbidden.

On the day I am going to tell about, Mama called me to the house and told me to take the coal oil can and go to the company store and get a gallon of coal oil with which to fill the lamps. She gave me a nickel with which to pay for it and cautioned me not to lose it. She also told me to take my brother along. I protested because he had a stone bruise on his heel at the time and walked on his toes on that foot because he could not bear to touch his heel to the ground. I complained that he would slow my progress and that he was too young to go to the store anyhow, seeing he had just turned seven. My arguments did not prevail and I took him along reluctantly, muttering to myself and threatening him as we went.

When we arrived at the store there were five or six men, miners from another shift, sitting on the front porch, mostly talking and whittling, and chewing Star cut plug tobacco. Miners who were not at work gathered here every day. I recognize one of them. It was Cottoneye Joe. I didn't know if he had another name. Miners were a rough lot and they nicknamed everyone without thought of compassion or feelings. Most of them didn't mind, I guess. Mr. Gorman, who had walked with a limp all his life, was always called "Crip," and Mr. Jameson, who had his back broken when a blast went off prematurely on a slope where they were tamping powder in a drillhole, was called "Humpy" because he walked all bent over and couldn't straighten up.

One of Cottoneye Joe's eyes was covered with a milky film and was sightless. As one miner said, "School was dismissed in his right eye because there was no pupil." But he was also called Cotton-eye to distinguish him from Deaf and Dumb Joe who lived down by the creek with his mother and

scared all of us kids out of our hides because he made such funny faces and sounds trying to tell something.

Cottoneye Joe was the village troublemaker. Everyone knew that he kept things all stirred up. As we walked by him into the store he grabbed me by the ankle and growled like a dog. I jumped like I was shot and stubbed my big toe against the door jamb. I saw stars. But I went on in and put my nickel on the counter, and Mr. Watson took it and filled the can with oil and put a potato on the spout to keep me from sloshing it out as I walked.

When my brother and I went back outside, Cottoneye Joe motioned to us and said, "Come here, you boys!" We walked over to where the men were sitting while dangling their feet off the porch.

Addressing himself to me, Cottoneye Joe asked, "Are you boys brothers?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "he's my brother and I'm his brother"

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Sure, I'm sure, Mr. Cottoneye. We really are brothers."

"Well, I don't believe it," he replied. "You can't be. He's got brown eyes and yours are blue. How can you be brothers and have different colored eyes?"

"Oh, that doesn't count," I replied. "According to that your eyes wouldn't even be brothers, 'cause one of 'em is white and the other is kind of greenish."

When I said that the rest of the men slapped their legs, threw their heads back and started to laugh, so I moved over to one side. You quickly learned to do that when men were chewing tobacco and started to laugh and splutter. You got out of the direct line of fire.

Some of the men could put their fingers to their lips and make a "V" and spit through their front teeth and hit a tomcat's eye across a sixteen foot room. They called that expectorating because they said when they did it you could expect the stream to go where you aimed. But when they laughed and spit, you didn't know what to expect. That's why I got out from in front of them. When I said what I did about Mr. Cottoneye's eyes not being brothers, everybody but him laughed and took on a lot. One of them said, "That boy's smart enough he's liable to turn into a preacher if someone don't rescue him."

But Cottoneye said, kind of grumpy like, "He's a smart-aleck, and he'll be lucky if he keeps out of the pen until he's twenty-one."

Then he turned to me again and said, "Don't be too sure that kid there is your brother. Does he like the same things you like to eat?"

"Sure, he does," I said. "We only have about one thing at a meal and everybody likes it, except he doesn't like ketchup on his butterbeans and I do."

“See, what did I tell you? You like ketchup on your butterbeans and he doesn’t. I’ll bet he’s not your brother at all. Somebody has just pulled the wool over your eyes.”

I turned away. I didn’t want to be sassy with older folks. It wasn’t right to stand up and argue with them in public in front of other people. A boy of nine ought to be polite at all times around grown folks, else they would think he had no raising by his Papa and Mama.

But I didn’t realize how much I had taken to heart what was said until evening. I was sitting by myself on the back steps and it was kind of dusky gray like all over. The evening star was shining, and the crickets were chirping, while a dry weather fly was making that whirring sound that always adds to lonesome feelings. Otherwise, it was all still and quiet, the kind of time when you think deep thoughts away down inside yourself, and wish that you were bigger and knew more things for sure like grownup folks do. It is a pretty ghostly time to be by yourself.

I began to wonder if I really did belong to Papa and Mama. Maybe they had just found me and took me in out of pity. Maybe I was left in a basket on the porch by the front door and I might never know my real folks. Maybe I was a wood’s colt. I didn’t really know what a wood’s colt was, but I knew their mothers had them and no one knew who their fathers were. When folks talked about them they generally spoke real low. Men talked about ‘em with a hand in front of their mouths, and women put their fans up and whispered behind them. If I was one, or an orphan either, chances are nobody would ever tell me the truth. Maybe Cottoneye Joe knew something about me that I didn’t know, else why would he have brought up about us being brothers? If that kid had stayed home and not gone limping along the road beside me, all this wouldn’t have come up. I was happy before and now I wasn’t and it was all his fault. He was so sure of everything and I couldn’t be at my age. I promised myself I would provoke a fight with him tomorrow and pay him back.

When Mama called and said it was time to go to bed, I didn’t want to go. I was angry and frustrated and I didn’t know why. I thought I’d stay awake in bed and think about things some more. But the smell of the fresh straw in the straw tick, coupled with the cool breeze blowing through the window and rustling the curtains, making them stand straight out, was too much for me. The screech owl that lived under the eaves of the barn flew to the maple tree just outside the window and let out a noise that would make goose pimples rise on you arms. But I just heard him once and then I was gone.

### **“I Kicked Him”**

When I awakened the next morning, the one I had always thought was my brother, but about whom I was not so sure now, was still sleeping, kind of wadded up like in bed. I kicked him a good one before I got out of bed and then jumped out, grabbed my clothes and ran. All morning I looked for a chance to hurt him and get back at him without really knowing why. I caught him once sitting in the swing under the cherry tree. He was eating a ripe tomato out of the garden, holding it in his right hand and trickling salt into it out of his left hand each time he took a bite. I picked up a bean-pole to try and knock it out of his hand into the dirt, but he stood up and threw it smack into my face, getting seeds all over my hickory blouse and salt in my eye. He ran for the house and I was so blinded I could not chase him.

Each day I became more upset and mean. Mama called me in one afternoon and asked me what had come over me or gotten into me. All I could do was sulk and look at her. I could not tell her that I was worried that I was not her boy and didn't know if I even rightly belonged there. I put my face in my hands and cried so hard that I shook all over. Mama was scared and tried to tell me everything would be all right. But it wasn't, and it got worse. I thought I might be dying, and I hoped that I would. I wanted to die.

Then one day I heard Mama say to Papa, "You're going to have to talk with him. He keeps telling his brother he hates him and doesn't want to see him any more. I am afraid if he keeps on he will do something to himself."

It was the next afternoon when Papa got off early from the day shift that he said to me, "Son, let's you and I take a little walk down by the creek." We started down the road that led to Deaf and Dumb Joe's house, but we turned off on a path the cows had made when they came in off the open range in the evening. And we walked down to the overhang, the flat rock which extended out over the creek at the pawpaw thicket. We sat down together, just the two of us.

It was the first time Papa had ever talked to me by myself like one man talks to another man. He began by saying, "Son, I have been wanting to talk to you for a long time. Mama is worried about you and the way you have been treating the other children. You've changed, and we don't know why."

I was trying not to cry because I knew men did not bawl when they were talking. Finally, I said, "I just don't know who I am. I'm not sure about things, not even anything. I'm not sure I even belong in our family."

For a moment Papa did not say anything. I was afraid he would laugh, but he didn't. He picked up a little rock and tossed it up and caught it. I saw the calluses on his hand which was so rough from using the pick and shovel underground. He started talking very slowly and softly.

"When I met your mother and asked her to marry me in spite of the fact that I was only a poor miner, I thought the time might come when I could have a boy like you. That is why, after we had been married a few months, I was glad that she told me we were going to have a baby. When the time came, Grandma came to the house to help the doctor, and it was she who brought you in, all red and wrinkled, and I saw you for the first time. You were ours, the first one resulting from our love."

I was crying now, but Papa didn't mention it. He went on. "Later on, your brother came, and then the girls, and now Mama is going to have another baby. I want you to be good to Mama and help her and not worry her. You see, we love all of you alike. All of us belong to one another. But Mama had a real hard time when you were born because you were the first. She almost gave her life for you. And now, if your father loves you all so much, you ought to love one another."

We sat a little while after that, neither of us saying anything. I knew that Papa was waiting for me to break the silence. I picked up a little stick and raked a large ant off my shoe. Then I said, "I will love my brothers and sisters, and I'll tell them so. I'm not worried now and I'm not afraid. It was being afraid that caused me not to love them."

## A Beautiful World

We got up and started toward home. I noticed things that I had not seen before. The clumps of wild violets were richer purple. The wing feathers of a jaybird were bluer than I remembered. Something was gone from inside me, something that had felt like a knot in my chest. It was a beautiful world and it was wonderful to be a boy, alive and filled with hope. The terrible thing which had been gnawing at my insides wasn't there anymore.

When dusk came and we had to go to bed, I took my things off and hung them on the brass knob on my side of the foot of the iron bedstead. My brother hung his things on the knob on his side. We crawled into bed and wriggled around until each of us had a place hollowed out in the straw tick to suit us. It was dark and kind of ghostly quiet. I could hear the swish of the owl's wings as he swooped by and then I heard a mouse squeak when he pounced upon it. The faint bark of Deaf and Dumb Joe's possum hound was carried on the night breeze.

I spoke to my brother lying beside me. "I'm not going to hate you anymore. I'm not going to fight you and I'm not even going to quarrel with you."

A long time went by. Maybe it seemed like it was longer than it was, but I was gripped by fear that he might ignore me. Then came the one word, "Why?"

"Today Papa and I had a talk, just the two of us." I said it rather proudly. "He told me that brothers ought to love one another because their father loves them all. When they hate one another and will not work together it only messes everything up and breaks the hearts of their father and mother."

"Yeah, but you don't want to do things like I want to do 'em. What about that?"

"That's easy. You do 'em like you want to unless Papa tells you not to, and I'll do 'em the way I want to unless he tells me not to. We'll let Papa be the judge, and I won't judge you and don't you judge me. Maybe both ways are all right, yours and mine, as long as Papa and Mama love us both."

"Are you not going to throw clods at me anymore when I don't hoe the beans like you want me to? What about that?"

"Do you throw clods at people you really love? No, you don't. I won't even hit you if you don't help get the potato bugs off the vines. From now on, I am not afraid or worried and I just don't have to hit anyone who doesn't do things like I do. I'll just let you be you, and I'll be me, and we'll belong to each other because Papa and Mama loved us and wanted us. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal!"

"Let's shake on it." Our two hands met in the darkness. I took the hand of my brother in my hand and we shook on it. And inner peace brought sleep, a calm and undisturbed repose.

It was years later that I learned that what we had done was to make a covenant, a childlike covenant to receive one another as we had been received, in love. It was then the words came back to me, spoken when disciples were jealous of one another and seeking special favor and recognition, and a

little child was set in their midst. “Except you repent and become as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” And when I think of that I still reach out my hand, even though it is in the dark, groping for the hand of my brother and ready to say, “It’s a deal, I love you!” You see, I’m not afraid anymore!

(Delivered at the Tulsa Unity Forum, July 57, 1973. Copied from *The Christian Appeal*, Vol. 39, No. 8; Feb. 1991)

## Chapter 22

# Analysis of Legalism

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

In the land of Moab, with the sentence of death resting upon him, Moses spoke to all Israel. Forty years had elapsed since the exodus from Egypt. Those who were rebellious at Kadeshbarnea had all died in the great and terrible wilderness. This farewell address was delivered to their children, now mature men and women. Reminding them of the day they stood before the Lord at Horeb, Moses said, “And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deut. 4:13). The covenant consisted of the “words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the deep gloom, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them upon two tables of stone and gave them to me.”

This is a significant declaration. From it we learn four things: (1) The covenant consisted of that which was announced orally to all Israel; (2) It embraced the ten commandments with their preamble; (3) It was written upon two stone tablets; (4) It was limited to the content of the oral message which was subsequently engraved upon the two tablets, *for the Lord added no more*. When they had heard the words of God the people were so frightened that the heads of the tribes approached Moses and besought him, “Go near, and hear all that the Lord our God will say; and speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you; and we will hear and do it.”

The Lord agreed to this, and instructed Moses to go and tell the people to return to their tents. However, he told Moses, “You stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, and the statutes and ordinances which you shall teach them.” There was a difference between the covenant which established their relationship as the elect of God; and the statutes, commandments and ordinances, which regulated them within that relationship. The apostle recognized this when he wrote, “They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (Romans 9:4).

The covenant made at Sinai, by which national theocratic status was conferred, was of such a nature, and to fulfill such purposes, as to require a definite written legal code to accomplish its design. The law is personified as a child conductor or custodian (Gal. 3:24), and as a guardian or trustee (Gal. 4:2). Now, just as one would not intrust children to the care of another who was immature, so the law had to be complete from the inception of the nation. Accordingly, the Lord revealed the law in its fullness – precepts, commandments, statutes and judgments – to the initial mediator. “For the law was given through Moses” (John 1:17).

## **An Important Difference**

In this is found a great divergence as respects the Christian economy. The first covenant was based upon justification by law; the second upon justification by faith in a person. “At the present time...he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). Since the “new covenant is not in a written code but in the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:6), no law was given at the creation of the covenantal

community on Pentecost in Jerusalem. Men simply heard an announcement of good news and accepted its implication in their lives. Those who were thus inaugurated as priests unto God had no distinctive writings of their own for many years. It was two decades before the first apostolic epistle, the one to the Thessalonians, was penned.

The epistles addressed to the followers of Jesus were written to individuals or communities as circumstances arose which called for them. Some were letters of thanks for favors received; other were letters of correction, admonition, and warning. One was written as a baptismal certificate for a runaway slave and to make a room reservation. In others occur personal notes as to the health and status of the writer, a prescription to correct stomach distress in the recipient, a request to pick up and return an overcoat, or to bring along books and writing materials. These letters do not always contain all the writers wished to say. "Though I had much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you, and talk face to face" (2 John 12; 3:John 13). "About the other things I will give directions when I come" (1 Cor. 11:34). This is not the language of legalism.

No congregation had access to all of these epistles for more than a hundred years. There was a considerable dispute as to which ones should be included in the sacred canon, and they were not collected, collated and compiled until a century after the royal priesthood was instituted. The primitive community of God had nothing to weld and cement it together but the fellowship of the Spirit. It was not a community based upon a written code; it was a community composed of believers in the Living Word. Its rule of action was a personal faith in a personal Lord; its motivating force was love. The governing message of ancient Israel consisted of the words of the law written in a book by the hand of Moses (Deut. 31:24). Not so, with us, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Such a message befits a covenant graven not upon tablets of stone but upon tablets of the heart.

## **An Economy of Law**

We must not digress further from our study of the first covenant. It was a legalistic arrangement to keep in confinement and under restraint those who were its subjects. Thus the covenant itself was legalistic. It consisted of law. The covenant given through Moses was law, but not all law given through Moses was part of the covenant. This will explain such statements as that of Paul, "Yet if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7). It is obvious that this statement is a part of the covenant. And because of this, other portions of the scriptures are referred to as law, being a part of a legal system

It is important that we understand the nature of a system of law as opposed to a system of faith for justification. Failing to do so, we will but substitute one law for another, and this is a fatal error. Any person who seeks to be justified by law must keep such law to perfection. The slightest deviation from it brings condemnation. One cannot set up in his heart a system of justification by law and then expect God's grace to rescue him in his failures, for grace operates through faith, and not through law. If we are now under a law, any law, for justification, our only hope, if hope it can be called, is to live in constant fear and dread and to keep its every provision and condition without fail. Few of us realize the full import of the hope inspiring statement, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and prophets bear witness to it, the

righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:21,22). Please observe that in this dispensation the righteousness, or justification, of God is manifested apart from law. Not “the law” but law!

The question naturally arises, “Why then the law?” It is not a new query, being first propounded in Galatians 3:19. The inspired answer is found at the same place. “It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” But justification did not come by the law, “for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose” (Gal. 2:21). It is plainly said, “By works of the law shall no one be justified” (Gal. 2:16), and again, “Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law” (Gal. 3:11). The law was powerless to make alive. It could only, in its ultimate, produce death. Since justification by law demands absolute conformity to the minutest degree, and since no man could to this extent fulfill the law’s demand, “the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me” (Rom. 7:10). “For if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Gal. 4:21).

### **The Weakness of Law**

What is true of the law given by Moses is true of any law as a basis for justification. The law given by Moses was of divine origin. “He received living oracles to give to us” (Acts 7:38). “It was ordained by angels through an intermediary” (Gal. 3:19). It was not unholy or unjust. “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12). It was not an unhallowed or unspiritual arrangement for “we know that the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14). How could that which came from God, was furnished by angels, and was holy, just, good and spiritual, fail to produce life? The answer is that it failed, not because of its origin, means of transmission, or character, but simply because man being what he is, it is impossible for him to be justified by law. The very essence of such justification is absolute and unvarying conformity. This requires perfect knowledge and understanding from the very moment one comes under the law. If he makes one mistake he becomes guilty under the law, and all of his good deeds in the future can never purge that guilt.

The law arouses carnal desires or passions. We must deal with man as he is. Filled with curiosity, the urge to experiment, and the ambition to learn by experience, that which is forbidden often lures him toward destruction. The very commandment intended to restrain all too often incites. The law identifies sin, points it out, and locates it as surely as a “Wet Paint” sign on a park bench warns the passerby. The apostle says, “If it had not been for the law I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness.” The tragic feature is that the penalty is death, for there is no mercy in law-only justice! “For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me” (Rom. 7:11). This is the inexorable fate of the legalist. He cannot escape. His own testimony as to his imperfection will condemn him.

It would do all of us good to prayerfully, thankfully, and tearfully ponder the tremendous force in the following. “While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (Rom. 7:6). I take it that the “old written code” was the law given through Moses. But I am just as convinced we do not serve under any written code. “We are not under law, but under grace.”

Certainly the “new life of the Spirit” did not include the book of Romans, for Paul was just writing it, and those whom he addressed had already been serving in the new life of the Spirit, before he wrote them. They would have been doing so if he had never written them. “The new life of the Spirit” is contrasted with “the old written code.” We are discharged from the latter which held us captive. We serve under the other regime!

It is here that the legalist, motivated by fear and trepidation, childishly depending upon fences and barriers to mark the bounds beyond which he dare not walk, timidly inquires, “But will we not lose a lot of brethren if they become convinced they are not under law?” Such a question only reveals the emptiness of his own soul. He is not so much afraid of what will happen to others. He dare not trust himself. In reality, he is affirming that Jesus is inferior to law; that the magnetic power of the divine example is weaker than a code of jurisprudence. The sad feature of it all is that such a person turns back in theory to the former dispensation and voluntarily seeks to place himself again under “guardians and trustees.” Of such the apostle wrote, “Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

### **Attitude Toward Scriptures**

But what will be the attitude of one who shares “the new life of the Spirit” toward the book of Romans, and the other writings of the apostles? If he does not regard them as “a written code” how will he consider them? He will certainly not worship them. It would be as wrong to worship the Bible as to worship nature. God reveals Himself in both. Bibliolatry and pantheism are both in error. We must worship the God whom the book reveals, and not the book which reveals God. Nor will one whose heart is attuned to the personality of God, a partaker of the divine nature, confuse the Source of life, with that which is provided to nourish and sustain him. One is not born by eating bread, either in the realm of nature or of grace. God had children under the new covenant long before one word of the new covenant scriptures was written down.

One will continue in the apostolic teaching as he learns it. He will study and do research therein all his life. He will alter and amend his life as he finds truths he had not discovered. He will not approach the scriptures as a lawyer goes to his statute books, but as an eager disciple to a school taught by a loving Master. Nor will he beat and belabor other students who are not so far advanced as he is. He will regard all who seek to learn from the great teacher as his fellow disciples.

He will search what is written that he may approach closer to the ideals of Jesus, not to castigate others. Thus it can be said, “And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Is it too much to say that “the new life of the Spirit” is intended and designed to “change us into his likeness” and that, as we walk and live with him, we rise from one degree of glory to another? Many a man who boasts of his knowledge of the Bible, and his ability to quote whole chapters, reveals by his life that he has never really found Jesus. Many an attorney pleading law before the bar is inferior in moral integrity. It is not “a new law” but “a new life of the Spirit” that makes men really free. We will do no good to turn over a new leaf. We must turn over to a new life. And “this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

The law could not give life. It could and did bring knowledge of sin. “For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom.

3:20). The law could and did bring wrath. “For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). It made nothing complete or perfect. “On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)” (Heb. 7:1819). These features did not militate against the law fulfilling its assigned role. “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 4:2324).

## **Basis of Division**

It is a misconception of our relationship to God under grace, and a lack of comprehension of the role of the new covenant scriptures in that relationship which is the basis of much of our grievous condition in the religious world today. My heart reaches out in sadness to those brethren who have convinced themselves that they best serve God by brutally castigating and verbally stoning their fellows. Humble men who cannot violate their own consciences, nor pay lip service to that which their hearts do not condone, are driven forth by those whose passions are aroused by the thought that they do the will of Him who died for all by attack upon some for whom He died. The body of believers is splintered and fragmented in the very name of Him who is “our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.” We have lived to see the day when an appeal for unity of believers is branded as heresy!

I am personally exercised in this matter because of my own culpability. Many who now regard themselves as administrators of divine law have been influenced by my own past teachings and example. For years I regarded no one as God’s child, or my brother, “who walked not with us.” Faithfulness to God was measured by loyalty to the party. The milk of human kindness curdled in our hearts, humanitarian love was squeezed into a narrow compress embracing only those affiliated with the party. “The brotherhood” was composed of those who took the right paper, or could obtain clearance from the right key man. All others were outside, regarded as apostates, pagans, and unbelievers. They were treated, or mistreated, as pariahs and untouchables. We were the church, the kingdom of heaven, the elect of God. Such was the bitter caste system of our factional creation.

All of this proceeded from a false philosophy, a rationalization which was Judaistic in concept, a belief that God had merely switched to a new law for justification in this age. Convinced that we were still under law I sought to be “educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.” There is a sense of pride in being right, in knowing that all who disagree are either sectarians or hobbyists; in feeling that those who dare oppose you are fighting against God because they oppose you. It brings an inward glow of satisfaction to realize that you are sound in the faith, a defender of the truth, while all others are dishonest, insincere, disloyal and unworthy of notice. “My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation, is known by all. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.” There are Pharisees among the spiritual seed of Abraham, as there were among his fleshly seed. I know whereof I speak!

But I now know that Jesus did not die for a party in the realm of Christendom. No faction is the one body. The members of no exclusive fragment constitute “the brotherhood.” No splinter party is “the loyal church.” This is a figment of minds distorted by ignorance of God’s purpose. The one

body is a covenantal community composed of all the saved. It is a fellowship, a communion of immersed believers in the Lord Jesus, whose lives are attuned to the harmony of the divine nature. Every person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells is my brother. To all such, by the same Spirit abiding in me, and ever seeking its own, I am drawn by a love which having embraced Him, reaches out to embrace all of His. The answer to the problem of division is the indwelling Spirit of God. Those who possess the Spirit, or rather, are possessed by the Spirit, “endeavor to guard the unity of the Spirit.” All who separate from their brethren, who seek to segregate, isolate and divide them do so because they do not possess the Spirit. “These be they which separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 19. AV). “It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit (Jude 19. RSV). “These are the men who split communities, for they are led by human emotions and never by the Spirit of God” (Jude 19. Phillips).

### **Futility of Law**

No law can possibly bring men together in heart. It is not within the power of law to do so. Law may provide for men being in proximity and its enforcement may maintain a degree of physical contiguity, but beyond this law cannot go. Our prisons are illustrations of this fact. The ineffectuality of law to accomplish the greater ideal is demonstrated in the turmoil in our own nation over integration. A Supreme Court decision can place white and colored children in the same classrooms, and soldiers may stand guard to see that the decision is heeded and obeyed, but the law of the land, and no interpretation of that law, can ever produce that quickening of conscience which alone can cause a reevaluation of the rights and dignity of our fellow citizens.

Even the divine law, ordained by angels in the hands of an intermediary, was “weak through the flesh.” And all law, either human or divine, must fall into that same category. The only hope of the fulfillment of the divine purpose, is for fleshly men, through some great transforming experience, to rise above the pale of law, to transcend the very domain of law, that is to be on a purely spiritual plane, and not in the flesh. How can this be possible? “But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9).

Fellowship and unity present no problems to the Spirit of God. They are problems only to those who seek to solve them by law. There is one Spirit. If that Spirit dwells in me, He will seek out all others in whom He dwells, and being thus united in one Spirit, we can work out the knotty problems of interpretation. The legalist disdains and discards the divine helper. To him the Holy Spirit is the written word, and his only approach to unity is through debate and argument. But what saith the word? “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Phil. 2:12). Note that agreement and full accord do not come by laying down the law to each other, but by encouragement in Christ, the incentive of love, fellowship in the Spirit, affection and sympathy. *Fellowship in the Spirit is not a fruit of agreement*, but precedes and produces it. The legalist always reverses this process. He demands that we be of the same mind and in full accord (with his position) as a prelude to fellowship, but God establishes a fellowship or participation in the Spirit first, and in that atmosphere we labor to complete or grow toward a unity of mind and heart. We have been training lawyers, instead of developing disciples!

## Man and Law

Jesus has revealed to us that man is superior to law. Man is made in the image of God. He was made but a little lower than God. He was not made for law, nor fashioned to be under it, and some day will be free from its restraints. Law was given because of the fleshly propensities. “Yet we all know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self control, for the man who is really wicked, who has neither scruples nor reverence” (1 Tim. 1:9). Our relationship with Jesus and each other on earth is designed to prepare us for the fellowship in heaven. In the glorified realm there will be no law, for the characters of those who are there will not require it. Under the beneficent rule of the Messiah, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, we are being fitted for the eternal abode. If we have principles, self control, scruples, and reverence, we require no law, for the law is given for those who have neither. But to turn the dispensation of grace into one of law, and appoint ourselves as judge, court, interpreter, bailiff and executor, to hound and harass those who cannot honestly agree with our every interpretation is to do evil and not good, regardless of how high our purpose, or how glorious and exalted our motives.

That we be not misunderstood, let us give a clear cut case of how the legalistic spirit operates in defiance of the intent of heaven. Remember that this spirit always first places an interpretation upon some portion of revelation, then exalts the interpretation to the status of revelation. Our blessed Lord, upon the night of his betrayal, instituted the Lord’s Supper. Since the act of eating and drinking together was considered a visible manifestation of fellowship by the world of mankind, in conformity with that view, he took bread, blessed it, gave it to his disciples and told them to eat it. In like manner he took the cup, and having given thanks, told them to drink of it. A supper required two acts, eating and drinking. These require two ingredients, a solid and a liquid. The solid selected was bread, the liquid was the fruit of the vine. The divine requirement was to eat bread and drink the fruit of the vine in communion or fellowship, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he come.”

It was not the eating and drinking which made them members of one body, but because they were members of one body, the covenantal community, they ate and drank together. This did not create fellowship or establish them in the fellowship. It demonstrated that they were in the fellowship because they jointly participated in the body and blood of Jesus. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf.” One purpose of Jesus in giving the Supper was to guard the fellowship against disintegration, by making it possible for his disciples to come together, or assemble as a church (1 Cor. 11:17, 18). Is it not peculiar that men have taken the very ordinance given to exemplify our fellowship and used it to destroy the communion it was intended to preserve? What an appalling and tragic picture it is to see the disciples of Jesus quarrelling over how to eat and drink, driving each other forth, creating factions and multiplying schisms, in defiance of the very purpose of the Supper!

Jesus gave no orders as to what kind of bread must be used, or how it should be broken or served. He gave no law as to the state of the fruit of the vine, or how it should be distributed. His only commands respected action – they were to eat the bread, drink the fruit of the vine, and do so in remembrance of Him. But men are not content to allow it to remain so. Those who depend upon

law for justification must make laws where God has not made them. To them, the only way to serve acceptably is to serve legally. They must thus prescribe in every minute detail. Those who do not conform are not “loyal” nor “faithful” to God. These brethren are not by nature, mean, uncharitable, or illiberal. They are not so much vindictive as they are victimized by their philosophy of salvation by law through partisan conformity, rather than by grace through faith. But this does not negate the terrible butchery in which they indulge on the body of Jesus. Those who first killed our Lord, said, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die.” The law they referred to was the one given by God. Thus the Son of God was condemned to die by an interpretation of the law of God; and His spiritual body is now mangled by exactly the same procedure.

There are those who make the law that the bread must be unleavened. They would actually refuse to eat with children of the Father who use leavened bread. They reason that Jesus chose unleavened bread, then make this a law. But Jesus did not choose unleavened bread. He had no choice. Being a Jew, he simply took the kind of bread in common use in every Jewish home at that particular time, the bread which was their staple fare for seven days. And the reason the Jews ate it was to remind them of the haste in which their fathers fled from Egypt, their speedy exit allowing no time for the yeast to rise. Not once does the sacred scripture use the word *azumos*, unleavened bread, in connection with the Lord’s Supper. It is always *artos*, a loaf, whether leavened or not. Then to draw apart from those who use leavened bread, to refuse to eat with them, and to count them as unfaithful to God, is to create “an unleavened bread party” on the basis of a manmade law! “Who made thee a judge and a lawgiver?” “These are they which set up divisions, worldly, having not the Spirit.”

But this is merely “the beginning of sorrows.” Congregations of believers have been riven into splinters even over the method of breaking the bread. Leaders have meticulously searched and scrutinized their “law” to determine the exact technical procedure to be followed. Like the scribes of old they have searched the scriptures, and built up traditions out of their interpretations. Some have concluded that the one who presides at the table must break the loaf in two parts before it is distributed. Others have contended fiercely that each participant must break off his own portion as it is passed to him. Parties have been formed, challenges issued, and debates held. A sin sick world has been treated to the sorry and sordid spectacle of a house filled with bitter partisans, separated physically by the center aisle, and in heart by their legalistic interpretations, fighting over how to break off a piece of bread representing the unity of believers in one body. In my library at this time is a book containing propositions for public debate, offered to the world as if salvation depended upon the settling of such technical and labored questions. Read these.

1. For a church to be Scriptural in its Communion service, the one serving at the table should, after thanks, break off a small portion of the loaf and eat it, before the other disciples partake. We affirm.
2. For a church to be Scriptural in its Communion service, the one serving at the table should, after thanks, break the loaf in two at (or near) the middle and both pieces should be passed to other disciples. *We deny.*

In such a discussion both disputants use identically the same scriptures. They quote the same passages. Each claims his own interpretation is the only correct one. Each demands that his interpretation be accepted as the holy will of God. All who do not concur with this canon and

subscribe to this rubric are branded, labeled and laughed out of court in scornful derision. They are driven out into the cold, unwept, unhonored, and unsung. This is the frightful length to which men will go under the guise of orthodoxy. They call such action “contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.” This is the effect of legalism, carried to its logical culmination, used to destroy and not to save!

In some cities there are “fermented wine” and “unfermented wine” parties. These have nothing in common except their zeal to fight and destroy each other. Childishly they call each other “fermented wine brethren” or “grape juice brethren.” But the term “brethren” is drowned either in the wine or the juice. Both search the scriptures diligently with the supreme purpose of bolstering their partisan position. Men who know nothing of Greek and who could not tell a Hebrew character from a chicken track in the mud, learnedly sound off about the originals for wine. They batter and attack each other with such venom as to make it appear the purpose of God in sending His Son to suffer on the cross was to make our hope of entering heaven dependent upon how long the grape juice had been made before being used to participate in the communion of His blood.

Others are variously designated as “cups brethren” or “one-cuppers” depending upon whether the assembled saints drink in memory of the Lord from one container for all, or one for each. Again the partisan champions all quote the same passages. All force the entire gamut of holy writings to pay tribute to their respective views and the positions they uphold. From the figurative “cups” mentioned by the prophets, to the incidental reference of the Samaritan woman regarding drinking from the well of Jacob, there is a great furor created, and the fellowship of the saints is hinged upon metonymical usages, with a goodly number of those present in debate, neither knowing or caring what the term means, since they have already chosen up sides, and are backing “our preacher.” All of this is the result of a false concept of our relationship to God, a failure to recognize the people of God as a covenantal community of believers, and an attempt to convert it into a regimented combine in which original thinking is treason and divergent opinion is the unpardonable sin.

## **My Position**

To me, this covenantal community is not a product of law, but of faith, hope, and love, the abiding and enduring factors. Our faith in Jesus has led us together. Only unbelief or lack of faith can separate us. At the table of the Lord I do not examine the bread, to see if it is leavened or unleavened. I do not examine the cup to see if it is fermented or unfermented. I do not examine the mode of breaking the bread, or of passing the cup. *I examine myself.* I can discern the Lord’s body whether the bread is leavened or unleavened, or whether the fruit of the vine is passed in a goblet or on a tray. In so doing I do not eat and drink judgment upon myself, and I am not to be judged by my brethren!

I do not love leavened bread or unleavened bread. I do not love grape juice or fermented wine. I do not love any particular method of breaking bread. I do not love one container or multiple cups. I love Jesus, and I love my brethren – *all of them!* And I do not propose to allow any of them to shove me into a party where I shall have to hate the rest of them. I do not belong to a leavened bread party or an unleavened bread party. I do not belong to a grape juice party or a fermented wine party. I do not belong to a cup party or an individual cup party. I am not a lawmaker or a judge. *I belong to Jesus.* He alone has my allegiance. He ransomed me, delivered me, and saved me. “He

is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

I can eat the bread and drink the cup with my brethren regardless of their modes or methods, means or manners, because my approach to God is through Christ Jesus, not through law! I will not disown a single one of God’s children because of my personal opinion or interpretation. If one group sets me at naught because I love all the rest and regard them as brethren, I shall not be tempted to hate those who thus judge. I will still love them in spite of their action, kindled though it may be by the narrow spirit of partisanship. My evaluation of brotherhood is upon the basis of Fatherhood. I shall not allow myself to put it upon any other basis.

It is in this spirit I now propose to examine the new covenant which establishes our relationship in this dispensation. It is my conviction, that the new covenant is no more written with pen and ink than it is upon two tablets of stone. It is written on fleshly tables of the heart with the Spirit of the living God. All whose hearts are so inscribed are a part of the covenantal community which God purchased with the blood of His Son. There is not a saved person on earth outside of this community. It is the one body. Besides it, there is no other. Every honest believer in the fact of the Sonship and Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth who has been immersed on the basis of that faith, has been inducted into that community. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” That those who have been brought into this majestic relationship with Deity have allowed themselves to be divided into factions and sects is one of the most regrettable features of this age. But I cannot be of service to them by being the spokesman for another faction. I must keep myself free in heart and mind, to love them all, to serve the best interests of every one of them, for all of them are my brethren in Him, regardless of the unfortunate circumstances which hold them aloof from each other.

Until our next issue when we shall investigate the nature of the covenant which produces the community of saints, we simply say, “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying.”

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## Chapter 21

# The Butting Brethren

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

It is generally recognized, I think, that I am a controversial figure. This is no novelty to me. I seem always to have been cast in such a role. I entered the restoration movement through a rather small but combative and vociferous segment. This required a constant attack upon others as traitors and apostates. It also demanded a considerable amount of debating over issues which seemed of such gravity that unless properly settled the earth would cease her stated rounds and the stars fall like untimely figs when a rude wind blows.

I never lost a debate. Neither did any of my opponents. This fact can easily be verified by reading our respective accounts of our skirmishes. In a more mature age I wonder if such discussions revealed a sense of insecurity in the party, and if we gained reassurance by jumping on representatives of bigger and older factions. That may also account for the aggressive stance of the whole restoration movement toward those who have grown up in various sectarian molds.

I am no longer a factional front man. I am no longer a sectarian at heart. Such vestiges of this work of the flesh which still cling to me are there because of ignorance and not because of my wish. I have renounced all sectarianism, ours as well as theirs, whoever they are! And now I find myself more of a problem to many of my brethren than ever before. They knew how to handle me when I was a party proponent because they have all of the arguments collected, catalogued and correlated for each party. I do not fit into any of their little compartments now. Praise God!

The accepted course of procedures when you learn you are in a faction is to change factions. This means that you search for one which is a little narrower or a little broader than the one in which you have labored, depending upon which way you are going. Then you affiliate yourself with the new faction and the party journal publishes your picture together with a notification to the "faithful brethren" that after so many years of preaching in error you have seen the light and will now accept meetings with the loyal church.

But I did not go anywhere! I had already shown that I could be as narrow as anyone where I was, so I decided to show you can be as loving as need be wherever you are. We do not need to leave some brethren to love all brethren. If you can't love them where you are, you'll not love them anywhere else. This game of musical chairs may be all right for a children's party, but our parties are composed of grown men, at least physically.

It is a genuine thrill to know that the only brethren you have are brethren in error. That eliminates the need of mentioning the fact. You've heard the old spiritual, "All of God's chillun got shoes." Well, all of God's chillun also have hang-ups, problems and unanswered questions. Some of them not only have problems, they are problems. But I receive them all just like God does. If he doesn't drive out his problem children I will not drive out my problem brethren. If they are in him, we are in him together. And I am not going to leave him or them. They don't have to love me for me to love them. Love is not a "horse trading" proposition.

This troubles a lot of folks. They wanted me to change my attitude, but they wanted me to reach only to them. When you start loving people in other parties you are “going too far.” So I get written up pretty regularly in all kinds of papers. Sometimes I’m called a traitor, a liberal, or a Judas Iscariot, and other things like that. One editor solemnly warned his readers that I was a “Pied Piper” but I wrote him that the Pied Piper influenced only children and rats, and he didn’t mention it any more.

None of this moves me. Really, I get a kind of kick out of it. I do not worry whether what is said is untrue. One of these days everything is going to be straightened out and squared up at the White Throne. I am willing to wait. It really isn’t too important what men say or think about me. It wasn’t to Jesus and it isn’t to me. I’ve learned that by following him as closely as possible I can love even those who think they are my enemies. It isn’t always easy but it is always satisfying.

It is interesting to read these little attacks in which brethren seek to limit my influence and create prejudice against what I am saying. Most of them follow a stereotyped pattern. Before me as I write are three of these articles. One says, “Brother Ketcherside’s writings for many months have presented some profound truths, in a writing style which is the finest in this generation, but...” Another says, “Brother Ketcherside is dangerous because he manifests the love he talks so much about. He is genial in disposition and disarming in manner, but...” The third says, “Do not misunderstand me. Carl is a powerful speaker and if he were sound on the fellowship issue he could be a tremendous force for good, but...”

If I just paid attention to what was before the “buts” I would think more highly of myself than I ought to think. If I concentrated on what followed the “buts” I might develop a mental depression or go into a blue funk. If you will pardon me for saying so, I am not going to be either cast down or built up by such aspersion and acclaim. I am just no longer working for the approval of men. What they say will neither set me up or upset me!

Someone has to cut across our silly lines. Someone has to ignore our trivial barriers. Someone has to batter down our fanatical walls. I intend to do it out of love for God. It is no sacrifice for me to do his will. I am thrilled to be set free by the grace of God. I shall never return to the narrow, bigoted, sectarian outlook which shackles the heart and quenches the Spirit. I shall not let well-meaning, but factional-minded brethren “but” me out of the eternal kingdom.

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Chapter 23

# The Essence of Christian Fellowship

*Leroy Garrett*

Those of us who teach philosophy find the word *essence* to be useful in getting to the inside of tough intellectual problems. The term may be equally helpful in probing the meaning of fellowship. In searching for the essence of fellowship we are looking for the heart of it, for what, without which, fellowship would no longer be fellowship.

Aristotle says that the essence of a thing is its *soul* or *whatness*, such as the soul of a knife would be that it cuts or that the soul of a pen is that it writes. Other thinkers identify essence as the *being* or *power* of a thing; or even the universal possibility of a thing. The essence of an acorn, therefore, would be its potential for becoming an oak.

It makes for interesting discussion among college students to raise the question of the essence of man. One student was getting at it when she pointed out that the essence of her own selfhood was “whatever it is, if I should lose it, I would no longer be me.” She could lose her eyes, ears, and power of speech and still be herself. She could even lose her limbs, as well as her possessions, and still be a person. She mentioned someone who was institutionalized, a serious case of psychosis, whom friends referred to in the past tense (He *was* such a fine person), as an example of one who has lost the essence of being human. So it has to do with mind and soul.

When Aristotle speaks of the essence of man, he refers to “proper function,” as in the case of the knife or pen. A pen that does not write has lost its essence and is no longer truly a pen. So a man who does not function according to his *unique* character is not truly man. Man may hunt, build houses, reproduce his species, and wage war; but this is not *unique*, for the animals do likewise. Man’s uniqueness is his power to think critically about himself and his world, and through intellectual effort to gain control of his environment. So people who behave only as animals are not truly human beings, for they have forfeited their essence, their proper function, according to Aristotle. It raises interesting questions about such folk as feral children (those who wander from civilization and are raised by animals), as to whether they are really human. Then the question moves on to the multitudes of people who live more like animals than intelligent human beings.

Aristotle’s point is that an acorn is not truly an acorn if it has no power to produce an oak, so a man is not truly man if he is not behaving in those ways commensurate with his nature. There is more to being a person than merely having the *physical* characteristics. The existentialists step in here and insist that it is not enough to live, for to really be one must exist. And so the likes of Jean Paul Sartre talk of “Existence precedes essence.” Most of us like to tell folk that they are not really living but only existing, but Sartre would turn it around and insist that people are only living and really existing. All this has to do with the *essence* of being a person.

It would be helpful if a bunch of us could get together, those of us representing our tragically divided brotherhood, and have this kind of critical discussion on the *essence of fellowship*. We speak in strange language about fellowship. Recently a brother was criticizing a lesson I had

presented, and he said: “He fellowships anything and everybody.” Obviously I did not succeed in getting my point over to him. It would be helpful to lay the matter out on the table before us and be precise as to what is meant by fellowship when used in such a context. He says I fellowship *everything*. Does this include doctrines like premillennialism and fundamentalism? Does it include things like instrumental music, Sunday School literature, and cups? If so, then fellowship is necessarily related to doctrines and things, and we are likely to have as many different fellowships as there things and doctrines.

He says I fellowship *everybody*, a reference that makes fellowship even more ambiguous. It sounds as if it is something that I *do* or *don't do* to a person, something that I extend and withdraw at will. That it is a word belonging to the family of *ship* terms should help to correct this impression. We may ask a man if Bill Jones is a partner with him in his business. We would be surprised to hear the man say, “No, I do not partnership Bill Jones.” It would be even more awkward to apply it to a thing, such as: “I'm not driving that old Ford. I don't partnership it.”

Or take companionship. We would never say “Don't companionship that man,” or “We don't companionship that night club.” These *ship* words imply a relationship between persons or as Webster indicates they show state or condition. Any “ship” relationship would suggest people are in the same state or condition. So I would say “He and I enjoy a beautiful friendship” but never “I friendship him.” We Christians would say “We share sonship with Jesus,” but never “We sonship Jesus.”

Then why do we have this hang-up on fellowship? The Bible speaks of “the fellowship of the Spirit,” but it would be confusing to find it saying “We fellowship the Spirit.” It says also “We have fellowship one with another,” which is very different from saying “We fellowship one another.” If we *have* something together, it is likely provided by someone else, but if fellowship is ours to give and withdraw, it becomes a commodity rather than a state. Even in such language as “You have fellowship with demons,” indicated in 1 Cor. 10:20, the idea is that of one moving into the same state or relationship with the demons. To say “You fellowship demons” would be as meaningless as “Tom friendships Jim.”

This helps our cause in getting to the essence of fellowship, for we can see that it has to do with state or relationship. Better still, it is a qualitative relationship rather than *quantitative*, for “ship” can be between two people or two million. It is a certain kind of relationship that puts them in the same state. When two men take on certain common quantities, they might be referred to as sharing a partnership. It is like the “hood” words. You become my neighbor by moving close to me, so that we share certain things in common. But we would never say “We started neighborhooding one another last summer.”

Even yet we are not ready to put a finger on the precise point of Christian fellowship. As we might do in studying the essence of man, let's look for a moment at what fellowship is not, that is, the qualities that could be missing and we would still have fellowship.

1. *Fellowship is not a matter of approval or endorsement.*

This is to say that we might not *approve* of a person's conduct or *endorse* the positions he holds and still be in the fellowship with him. Indeed, fellowship might be sweeter and more meaningful if we

did approve, but it is not *necessary* to the relationship. The Bible is replete with examples of this. Paul certainly did not approve of Peter on some occasions, rebuking him to his face as he did, but they remained in the fellowship together. The apostles were always disagreeing, sometimes rather bitterly, but this did not impair fellowship. And so it is with the “hoods” and “ships” of life. Brothers in a family seldom agree, but still there is brotherhood. Business partners often have a time of it, but still there is partnership.

*2. Fellowship is not a matter of agreement on doctrine or opinions.*

Look at the congregation at Corinth with all its disagreements, a condition that reached serious proportions. But this did not keep Paul from writing that “You were called into the fellowship of his Son” and “You are the body of Christ.” It is true that factious behavior placed a great strain upon fellowship, as foul business practices do to a partnership, but it did not nullify the relationship they shared in Christ. If fellowship were dependent upon agreement in ideas, doctrines, and practices, then the Corinthians could never have been called by God into the fellowship, for their backgrounds were so different that they could never have seen everything alike. In 1 Cor. 6 Paul says that they came out of a background of thievery, homosexuality, idolatry, and drunkenness. It would be impossible to get a unanimity of viewpoint out of a crowd like that. But the miracle of grace is that out of such a checkered background, that included the noble as well as the ignoble, God could bring them all into relationship with His Son. Unity in diversity! And can there really be any other kind?

*3. Fellowship is not a matter of being right or wrong doctrinally.*

Nothing is made plainer than Paul’s language in Romans 14, where he is saying that one brother believes one thing, while another brother believes something else, and obviously they think each other to be wrong and themselves right. “One man will have faith enough to eat all kinds of food, while a weaker man eats only vegetables,” he says, “The man who eats must not hold in contempt the man who does not, and he who does not eat must not pass judgment on the one who does; for God has accepted him.” Here we have the basis of fellowship: *God has accepted him.*

If God accepts him as a son, I am to accept him as a brother, regardless of how right or wrong he may be, which I can judge only by the way he agrees with my own position! The point is that God claims us as his children even when we are wrong, and so we are to accept each other.

We get hung up on this bit about “brothers in error,” as if there were some other kind. Were not Paul and Peter in error? At least Paul says Peter stood condemned, and Peter says Paul writes stuff that you can’t understand. If fellowship depends on being right about everything, then a person cannot be in fellowship even with himself. If we were not all wrong at one time or another, and a bit stubborn along with it, there would be no place for forbearance.

The admonition to “forbear one another” indicates that there is sometimes a lot to endure from each other. This we do because we are in the fellowship together, not to make the fellowship possible. Fellowship would therefore be no greater, or more extensive, between two brothers that agree on hardly anything except their common love for Jesus. Just as in my father’s family, some of us seem to see eye-to-eye on most things of common interest, while others hold widely divergent views. But those who differ with me are no less my brothers.

#### 4. Fellowship is not a matter of knowledge.

One can enjoy the fellowship that is in Christ and be a grossly ignorant man, including an ignorance of the Bible. So it was in the primitive congregation, where they did not yet have the Bible. Surely many could not even read, being slaves and in poverty. But even the ignorant man can have faith and be in love, and it is this that made fellowship possible. Christ was their wisdom. They trusted Him and they loved each other. Paul was adamant with the Corinthians about the limitations of knowledge. It will fail when the pressures come, and so love is the gift to desire above all others.

We set up a standard of knowledge in our measure of the bounds of fellowship. One must understand certain things about the church, and certainly he must understand that baptism is for the remission of sins. It was not so with the early Christians. Baptism was an act of faith, not a matter of knowledge.

Surely we are urged to “grow in knowledge” and the knowledge of the Lord is a Christian virtue. But it is fellowship that makes such growth possible, and not the growth that makes the fellowship possible. A family may have a retarded child, but this in no wise threatens his sonship with the other children. God too has retarded children, any who will never be able to do much growing, but all such are no less our brothers in the Lord.

If the essence of fellowship is not any of these things, then what is it? *The essence of fellowship is sharing the common life.* There can be fellowship where there is disagreement, disapproval, ignorance, and differences in doctrine and opinion; but there can be no fellowship apart from sharing. *Sharing* gets to the heart of the meaning of *koinonia*, the Greek term for fellowship. *The New English Bible* has some beautiful renditions of the verses on fellowship. Notice how it uses the term sharing to express the idea:

“It is God himself who called you to share in the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:9)

“If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart, any living consolation, any sharing of the Spirit, and warmth of affection or compassion, fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike.” (Philip. 2:12)

“What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)

“If we claim to be sharing in his life while we walk in the dark, our words and our lives are a lie; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, then we share together a common life, and we are being cleansed from every sin by the blood of Jesus his Son.” (1 John 1:67)

“They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray.” (Acts 2:42)

It is evident enough that if all these years we had access only to the likes of *The New English Bible* (and what a blessing that would have been!), we would never have been guilty of such talk as “We don’t fellowship the instrument,” or “We at Eastside don’t fellowship the Westside congregation.” Such talk makes fellowship mean *endorsement* or *approval*, which is not remotely related to the

idea of *koinonia*. When the folk at Eastside are asked, “Do you share the common life in Christ with those at Westside?” the answer may be different. The question is at least different. Eastside may disagree or disapprove of some things at Westside, but still share the common life with them.

So we suggest a moratorium on the use of the word *fellowship*, which does not even appear in *The New English Bible*. Let’s use “share the common life” instead. We’ll discard some bad habits. It is safe to assume that no one will be saying “I don’t share the common life with the instrument.”

This will do something else for us, for it will raise serious questions about whether we truly share the common life in Jesus with those we have been claiming “to fellowship.” If fellowship has been mainly a matter of endorsement, there may have been little real sharing. To agree on certain doctrines that make some particular party distinctive is one thing; to share together a life of hope, hardship, reprisals, and victory is something else. To sit together in a million dollar building, presumably believing everything alike, and listen to someone sermonize on the party line is not sharing the common life. Sharing the common life is being with the sick and distressed together, going to the ghetto together, joining efforts in a work of love. It is enjoying and loving Jesus together. It is weeping, laughing, and singing together. It is the joy of being with each other, for it is like being with Jesus himself.

So, to go back to the complaint of the existentialists, who tell us that we’re not really existing but only living, we might register our concern this way: We are not really sharing the common life, for we’re only “fellowshipping” one another.

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## Chapter 24

# Thoughts on Fellowship

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

It would seem appropriate for me to once more suggest some of the ideas I have advanced concerning fellowship. In order to facilitate replies by those who are so inclined, I will number the various points.

1. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, and there is no single English word which is its exact equivalent. It connotes mutual sharing or joint participation, since it stems from the word *koine*, which means "common." *Koinonia* refers to that which is held in common, and in the new covenant scriptures it is the sharing of the common life created by the indwelling Spirit of God. Every person on earth in whom the Spirit abides is in the fellowship with every other such person in the universe.

Thus it is called "the fellowship of the Spirit" (Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:14). Fellowship is not something we extend or withdraw, but it is a state into which we are called. "God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). *The New English Version* gives the best translation, "What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

2. Harmony is not essential to fellowship but is a goal of those who are in the fellowship. We do not achieve harmony in order to be in the fellowship, but because we are in the fellowship, we seek to achieve harmony. There is not a passage in the apostolic doctrine commanding harmony which was written to bring the saints into fellowship. Every such passage was written to those who were in the fellowship and because they were in it. We suggest that you study Philippians 2:1,2; 1 Corinthians 1:9,13; and 2 Corinthians 13:11. We are not in the fellowship because we walk in peace, but we walk in peace because we are in the fellowship.

3. Fellowship is not the endorsement of another's position or views. Fellowship is a state into which we are called by God through the Good News of Jesus Christ. We enter it by the proper response to that News. Every sincere believer who is immersed upon the basis of his trust that Jesus is God's Son and the Messiah, is in the fellowship in spite of his ignorance or warped opinions about many other things. Endorsement is an act of individual will in which one approves or supports the opinions or acts of another when he agrees with or concurs in such opinions or acts.

We endorse a lot of things done by people with whom we are not in fellowship; we are in fellowship with people who do a lot of things we cannot endorse. God certainly did not endorse a lot of things done by the saints in Corinth, but they were in his fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9).

In Galatians 2:9 Peter is said to have given the right hand of fellowship to Paul, but in verse 11, Paul withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed. I do not think that anyone would be so rash as to say that they were no longer in fellowship. No congregation of believers on this earth is

composed of those who completely endorse one another's views, interpretations, or ideas. It is for this reason that each faction has to arbitrarily agree upon some item on which there must be agreement as a criterion of fellowship and acceptance. And whatever that thing is it becomes the creed of the party.

4. Fellowship is not contingent upon unanimity of opinion and has no real relation to it, although the twisted factional mentality seeks to establish such a relationship. The unity of the Spirit is based upon community, not conformity. The only unity attainable by thinking men is that of diversity. The unity of conformity must first reduce men to robots. It belongs to the wax museum and not to the temple of God. Jesus did not die for puppets nor allow himself to be murdered for manikins.

In Romans 14 we learn that there were varied opinions in the early church. These were not allowed to become the basis of rejection. "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions" (verse 1). "One man believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables." Paul effectively spiked the creeping creedal conformity which has so often blossomed forth in all of its inglorious tendencies in modern Church of Christism. The entire chapter is a stirring apologetic for unity in diversity. It stands squarely athwart the path of every partisan journalist in our day.

In our time one who ate anything or everything would be called a sectarian or liberal. The one who restricted himself solely to vegetables would be an anti, an extremist, or an ultraconservative. To Paul, who rejected such asinine labels, they were children of the same Father or slaves of the same Master. "To his own master he stands or falls." It is ridiculous for one slave to try and throw out another whom he does not own because he will not eat meat – or because he insists on singing "Jesus is all the world to me," while someone else is pounding out the beat on a piano.

A considerable number of our brethren have been suffering from a Messiah complex, and they are anxious to save God from any undue worry, by taking care of as much of the final judgment as possible in advance. Every factional leader on earth begins by giving Jesus a shove and squeezing down in the throne as his authorized mouthpiece and representative. It is no problem to push the brethren around after you have shoved Jesus to one side. It will be a great day when all of us learn that Jesus has no prime ministers!

5. Equality in the attainment of spiritual knowledge is not the foundation of fellowship. This is obvious when one realizes that in spite of his ignorance he has been accepted into the fellowship of the Father and Son. Jesus would be very lonely if he eliminated all of his "brothers in error." If we must wait until our knowledge equals that of the Father before he can receive us into his fellowship we have a long period of detention on the outside. Fortunately God accepts some fairly superficial characters, as almost any good mirror will reveal, and the apostle says, "In a word, accept one another as Christ accepted us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

The family of God consists of babes and children as well as young men and fathers. These who are born of the water and of the Spirit are not born in a state of maturity. Some of them develop rather slowly and some are dwarfed from malnutrition and from being beaten over the head by their guardians. God has some children who are deformed because of being hastened to delivery before the period of gestation was completed normally. Not all of the saints enjoy perfect vision.

We must not forget that the Christian life is a walk and we are not going to heaven in a clump or cluster. We are strung out along the highway, but it is not necessary that we keep up with one another. It is only necessary that we keep in the Way. If the trumpet sounds while we are crippling along because of our blisters, God will find us. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save!

Life in Christ is a growth and all growth demands change and alteration. Not all children reach the same height. Some of our brethren are following Procrustes instead of Jesus. That mythical highwayman set up a bed on the main road and forced every traveler to lie upon it. Those who were too long had their legs cut off; those who were too short were stretched to the required length by pulleys. The perceptive reader will not need to be told whose height was used as a criterion of measurement.

There was a considerable latitude in the primitive community of saints. Take Corinth for example. There were some of the brethren who did not know there was one God. "But not everyone knows this. There are some who have been so accustomed to idolatry that they even now eat this food with a sense of its heathen consecration." Others did not accept the idea of the resurrection. "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" But Paul did not divide them into a "Resurrection Church of Christ" and an "AntiResurrection Church of Christ."

Instead, he said, "Of course we all 'have knowledge' as you say. This knowledge breeds conceit, it is love that builds. If anyone fancies that he knows, he knows nothing yet, in the true sense of knowing. But if a man loves, he is acknowledged by God." I sometimes wonder if Paul was rubbing it in on the "know-it-alls" in the congregation, by pointing out that they claim to know a lot, but they didn't even know how to treat brethren who differed with them, and that is about one of the first things God wants us to learn.

He did not tell the knowing brethren to separate from the ignorant Christians or to come out from among them as if they were pagans or unbelievers. His admonition was, "Mend your ways; take our appeal to heart; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

### **Foiling the Critics**

Some of my earlier critics freely predicted that I would merely create another faction and complicate matters by starting an antiparty party. I have been able to prove that they were not possessed of the gift of prophecy. There are several things which have contributed to this.

1. When I learned that the factional attitude which prevailed among the restoration heirs was a work of the flesh, a sin against God, and a sign of immaturity and carnality, I did not leave the brethren with whom I had been associated and go join another group. I simply repudiated all factionalism but I did it from where I was by accepting and welcoming all of my brethren. I stayed where I was and loved them where they were. I no longer recognize as valid any of the artificial walls which they had thrown up. I paid no further attention to the tests of union and communion devised by any group.

2. When I went among brethren I did so simply to share my thinking with them, and to share in their concepts. I did not seek to proselyte followers nor to persuade anyone to my way of thinking. I had

already learned that I could love those who differed with me as much as I could those who concurred in my views and I did not worry about “lining them up.” To me, a Ketcherside party would be as disgraceful as any other. I never asked any person to alter his methods to pamper my personal feelings. I considered every invitation from sincere saints as a door opened unto me of the Spirit.

3. I urged every person who advanced in learning not to leave the brethren with whom he had always labored to go join the faction which had taught him a new truth. This would only serve to remove the leaven from where it was needed and transfer it to where it was not, and it would breed hatred and envy. There have been some instances where brethren felt they were driven out but I have steadfastly refused to urge them to form another faction.

If every person stays where he is the spread of factionalism will be stopped cold at its present level and that level will gradually decline under the benign influence of the Holy Spirit. One of the most gratifying things that has happened is to see men who have grown in knowledge beyond their factional constituency, remaining with the brethren who have supported them in the past.

4. Now there is a vast army of the concerned ones and these are distributed among all of our factions. They will act as leaven for peace and we shall within our generation see a tremendous change of attitude. Brethren will repudiate the false propaganda that purity of doctrine can only be maintained by separation from other brethren. Many will help to build bridges across the chasms which Satan has created. There are still pockets of partisan venom. There are some men who are purveyors of hate against brethren. There are journals whose editors confuse the partisan status quo with first century Christianity. Other editors ride the factional merry-go-around and try to wave first to one side and then to the other. But these will gradually forfeit any real influence and those papers which drum up issues so they can project themselves as the defenders of orthodoxy will soon be seen in their true light.

As for myself, I would have it plainly understood that I intend to make no test of fellowship out of either the pro or con of a position on instrumental music, centralized control, colleges, orphan homes. leavened bread, unleavened bread, the manner of breaking the bread, fermented wine, individual cups, prayer coverings for women, Bible classes, uninspired literature, foot-washing, speaking with tongues, or any other of the “issues” which periodically raise their disturbing heads and breathe their fetid breath in our faces. Our real problem is not with those who claim to speak in other tongues, but with preachers who claim to speak English and are still talking in unknown tongues.

I have a firm personal conviction on all of these things but I will not impose it by force or coercion upon others. I’ll express my view and listen to brethren who differ with me and go on their way rejoicing. If a man is good enough for God to receive he is not too bad for me to accept. I am sick and tired of our whole sad, sorry and gruesome sectarian mess. I never intend to be a party to its promotion again, so help me God. I shall never be used as a cat’s paw to pull partisan chestnuts out of the factional fire. And as Patrick Henry said, “If that be treason, make the most of it!”

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## Chapter 25

# On the Rocks

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

In the simpler days of earth, rude shepherds counted their flocks and herds upon their fingers and toes. Each toe was touched by the staff and each finger with the thumbs and when a complete round was made a line was drawn in the sand and this line was called a score. A score was thus twenty; forty was two-score, or two lines; and sixty was three score, or three lines. We still refer to the toes and fingers as digits, even as we do figures or numbers.

Sometimes a notch or line was cut into a stick for each group of twenty, and we still use the word “scoring” for the making of such lines. We say a piston is scored when reduced oil pressure causes friction to make lines in its surface. And we still talk about keeping the score in a game or contest, although it now means to keep the tally, rather than to count by twenties.

As man developed commercial interests through barter or trade, lines were drawn in the sand were no longer adequate, and a new medium of computation providing for subtraction and division, as well as addition, was required. Small white pebbles were found to be best suited for the purpose. Such a pebble was called a *calculus*.

In ancient Rome chariots for hire were kept at the outer gates of the wall to transport passengers to the inner city. The driver counted twenty and dropped a calculus into an urn, and repeated the process until arrival at the destination, where the calculi were poured out and the passenger paid accordingly. Our word “calculate” means “to count by stones.”

These chariots were the first taxicabs, although this word is from the French. The word “cab” is an abbreviation for *cabriolet*, a young goat, because the first such vehicles were driven over the cobblestones of Paris, jostled and jounced and cavorted about like a young goat on the rocks. Of course the word “taxi” has to do with tax, and in our day we hardly need to explain that this refers to an assessment, or fee. A taxicab is a vehicle which assesses a fee for its use.

We hope this is all interesting but it actually doesn’t have a thing to do with our real theme. We want to talk about the word *scrupulous*, which also meant a rock, but literally “a small sharp stone in the shoe.” All of us have experienced the acute discomfort which comes from trying to walk with such an object in our footwear. It is from this that our word “scruple” is derived and this is the word used by J. B. Phillips to translate the Greek *dialogismos* in Romans 14:1.

The Greek term denotes inward reasoning resulting in an opinion or personal conviction, especially as related to the formation or development of a doubt. Phillips has it, “Welcome a man whose faith is weak, but not with the idea of arguing over his scruples.” The New English Version reads, “If a man is weak in his faith you must accept him without attempting to settle doubtful points.” The Revised Standard Version says, “As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions.”

Because of the context we are inclined to like the word “scruples” in the passage. A scruple is the fruit of conscience which has been impregnated by doubt. It is the result of one’s own inner reasoning although it may have begun with a suggestion from another. When there is a question about the propriety of a thing the one who questions it must abstain from doing it, or stifle the conscience which acts as a monitor in all such affairs.

When the apostles were alive there were two matters which created real problems among the saints. One related to the eating of meats; the other to the keeping of special days. In our culture these are no longer concerns, but nothing that troubles us now is of more importance than these were then. They were questions fraught with intense emotional strain, creating suspicion and distrust. They had in them the potential for the fragmentation and disruption of the communities of the saints. Men had genuine scruples against eating meat which might have been consecrated to idols and in celebrating certain days.

The apostolic approach to the problem was unique. It is fully set forth in Romans, chapter fourteen. It took into consideration the natural reactions of two who try to walk together, while one has a sharp pebble in his shoe. The one who does not is inclined to despise the one who has the impediment; the one who possesses the scruple is inclined to judge and censure the other. Here are the considerations which should eliminate the contempt of one and the condemnation of the other.

1. God has received them both, not because of their attitudes, but in spite of them.
2. Neither one belongs to the other, but both belong to a common master. It is ridiculous for a slave to try and dispossess another slave whom he does not possess.
3. Each man is to be fully persuaded in his own mind and act in accord with his personal conviction.
4. The judgment seat of Christ has been appointed as the tribunal for all, and premature judgment of others is playing at being God.
5. A thing which is right in itself becomes wrong to one who has the conviction it is wrong, although it is not wrong to others.
6. A brother is superior in value to anything which we may desire and must never be sacrificed in order gratify self.
7. All are to pursue these things which promote peace and which are mutually up-building.

It is obvious that a small gravel which appears insignificant to one who does not have to walk upon it may be a real problem to one who must do so. The one who can walk without flinching may have to slow down voluntarily to walk with his brother. He must never boast about his freedom and must not hold his brother in contempt for limping along.

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Chapter 26

# Withdrawing from the Disorderly

*Leroy Garrett*

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received from us. 2 Thes. 3:6, KJV*

The apostle Paul was having an odd kind of problem with the believers in Thessalonica. In one manner of speaking they were *over converted*. So wrapped up were they in the expectation of an early return of Jesus from the heavens that they no longer bothered with the “business as usual” kind of existence. Since the Lord was due to come just any moment, they had quit their jobs and ceased all work. After all, if God is going to ring down the curtain and bring an end to it all, why bother to cultivate the crops, report to your foreman on Monday morning, or enroll the kids in school?

Had Jesus come all that soon there would have been no problem. But as he tarried the weeds continued to grow, work around the house piled up, and stomachs began to growl with hunger. While they were waiting (and surely it could not be much longer!) it was convenient for them to live off other believers, whose conversion had not led them to such a radical change in day-to-day living. They, too, believed in the Lord’s coming, but they continued to stack up the firewood, cultivate their crops, and report for work as usual. They were like the presiding elder of an assembly of divines in New England when heavy clouds moved in over the area, darkening their procedures. Some of the clergy cried out that it must surely be the end of the world, that the Lord Himself was at hand. The elder calmed his fellows and called for the candles to be lighted. “If the Lord comes,” he assured them, “it is just as well that he finds us at work.”

Such a problem is intensified if people are inclined toward indolence anyway, as most of us probably are. I’m always looking for good excuses to escape some of my inevitable tasks! Some of the Thessalonians had this problem, and what is a better excuse than the world’s sudden demise? Why chop wood if nobody will be around to cram it into the cook stove? Why bother with preparing meals since we will at any moment be caught up in the air? In the meantime, if there is a delay tactic on the Lord’s part, we can always drop in on the Smiths and have a meal with them, and while we are there we can borrow a leg of lamb, just in case the Lord keeps postponing the big event. That the situation was something like this at Thessalonica is evident from what Paul writes to them in the first letter, which apparently did not have the effect intended.

Williams renders 1 Thess. 4:11 this way: “Try hard to live quietly, and mind your own business, and work with your hands, as we told you.” The Jerusalem Bible puts it: “Make a point of living quietly, attending to your own business and earning your own living, just as we told you to.” The first letter is filled with teaching about the second coming, with at least one reference to it in each chapter. In both letters the point is made that, while Jesus will indeed come again, they are not to be disturbed about it as to make normal living difficult or impossible. “Let no one mislead you,” he urges, and goes on to assure them that certain things must take place before the Lord comes, such as

the great rebellion and the appearance of the man of sin. And so in 1 Thess. 5:14 he includes in his list of admonitions: *We urge you to warn the idle.*

But Paul goes even further. Not only does he warn against idleness and indolence, whether they use the second coming as a reason or not, but he even demands that *If a man will not work, he shall not eat* (2 Thess. 3:10). He tells them that he himself was an example for them in this regard, for while in their midst he took no one's food without paying his part, even though he had the right to expect them to provide his necessities (verses 78).

Now we have the context for this terribly abused passage before us. In 2 Thess. 3:6 he is talking about these people who will not work and who go around sponging off people. This violates his own example as well as his instructions. The *King James* rendering, "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" is improved upon in other versions, though this version is clear enough when the entire paragraph is studied. In v. 8 the apostle tells them that he did not "behave disorderly" in that he worked and was chargeable to no one. Verse 11 identifies the disorderly as those who "work not at all, but are busybodies."

Other versions make verse 6 even clearer. Phillips has it: "Don't associate with the brother whose life is undisciplined." and the *Revised Standard* puts it: "Keep away from any brother who is living in idleness." The *New English*: "Hold aloof from every Christian brother who falls into idle habits," while Williams gives it as: "Avoid any brother who is living a lazy life."

The apostle is obviously dealing with a very special problem. Using the coming of Christ as a reason, some of them no doubt sincerely, a number had turned to a life of idleness and indolence, which not only made for an imposition upon others who were poor to start with, but which also violated the principles and example that Paul had set before them. Some strong measure had to be applied. So he is telling the faithful to avoid or hold aloof those who refuse to work and bear their own load. *When they come around, don't let them impose on you, don't feed them. Put a hoe or an ax in their hand and let them work for what they eat.* This is what he is telling them.

### **No Formal Withdrawing**

That this has no reference to any kind of formal withdrawing of fellowship is evident by the context. Paul did not want these people run off. He wanted them to get on the stick and get to work. His final word on the subject is in 2 Thess. 3:14-15 where he says, "If anyone refuses to obey our orders in this letter, note that man; have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed of himself; but do not consider him an enemy; warn him as a brother." The brother who would not heed the apostle's urgings was to be kept at bay. They were not to associate with him nor in any way encourage his prodigality, including turning him away from the door at mealtime. This might lead the brother to shame and get him back in line. Paul never really touches upon the subject of excluding such ones from the fellowship of the congregation, as he does, for instance, in the case of the fornicator at Corinth. Such idle ones might well have shown up in the assemblies at Thessalonica, for, after all, they were supposed to be standing by, waiting for Jesus to come. The apostle does not deal with this part of the problem, except to tell the faithful to "warn him as a brother." So they kept on treating them as *brothers*. I can hear one of them say to such an erring one, "Andy, I'll be up early plowing in the morning and I surely could use some help. When the day is over, we'll have a sack of food ready for you to take to your family." Or Mary might invite

Ruth over for a quilting or a cooking spree, after which the spoils would be divided. But they would avoid them or hold them aloof insofar as they sought to impose their idle ways upon others.

So, the passage isn't really all that involved, is it? It emerges in Paul's writings only because of this sticky problem in that small, persecuted, poverty stricken congregation in Thessalonica. Paul could never have dreamed that his words, "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" would someday be used as a proof text for "withdrawing fellowship" from those who veer from this or that doctrinal position, whether in reference to a divorce, speaking in tongues, importing an organ, becoming a Mason, conducting a Sunday School, using uninspired literature, adopting the pastor system, or supporting a TV/radio program through the treasury of the church.

It is common for our bulls of excommunication, those letters of "disfellowship" that make the rounds, to begin with a quotation of this passage. "In view of the apostle's injunction to withdraw fellowship from all those who walk disorderly we do hereby..." may well be the language. Somebody, sometimes an entire congregation, gets the ax, and 2 Thess. 3:6 is the proof text. Any person who breaks rank with what might well be called "Church of Christism" is said to be walking disorderly and comes under the indictment of 2 Thess. 3:6. Pat Boone began to "walk disorderly," not while sipping cocktails at Hollywood parties, but when he began to speak in tongues. A congregation is said to be "walking disorderly" when it invites "liberal" preachers or allows women to conduct seminars.

We have seen that Paul really never said anything about "walking disorderly" to start with, but something like *living in idleness*. But even if we take that term and apply it to some behavior in the scriptures, which would surely be *disorderly*, if anything would, it does not necessarily bear any such penalty as we seek to impose upon 2 Thess. 3:6. Take Gal. 6:7 where Paul refers to a brother being "overtaken in a trespass," which is surely *disorderly* conduct. But there is no reference to withdrawing from him, but of restoring him in a spirit of gentleness. There was a great deal at Corinth that was *disorderly*, such as taking each other to court and having assemblies that were confusing and unedifying, but the apostle did not relate this to withdrawing fellowship.

We *all* walk disorderly in one way or another, just as we are all wrong or "brothers in error" in one way or another. It is a matter of intention and the condition of the heart as to how serious these errors are. What really counts is our faithfulness to Jesus. If we lift him up in our lives, yielding ourselves to his example and to the scriptures the best we know how, then our feebleness, our disorderly moments in act and thought, our errors in judgment and behavior will be covered by his love and grace. If this is not the way of it, then we may as well call the whole thing off, for all our works, even those "done in righteousness," are for naught. It is only by his mercy that we are saved, not by orderliness of doctrine and practice.

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Chapter 27

## Causing Divisions

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

No scripture is safe in the hands of a religious partisan. The reason is obvious. The party spirit is a work of the flesh. It is opposed to the Spirit. It will debar one from inheritance of the kingdom (Gal. 5:17-21). The factious spirit is indicative of immaturity. Those guilty of it can hardly be addressed as spiritual men, but as babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). However, the partisan jealously seeks to defend his party. To do so, he must warp and bend the scriptures. He must make them apply in a sense which God never intended.

The revelation of heaven was not given to be the private or exclusive possession of any sect or party. It is not a factional handbook. No uninspired man is an official interpreter of revelation. No group of men can advance themselves as the authorized expositors of sacred writ. God's word is authoritative. The interpretations placed upon it, or the opinions of men about it, are not. It is here the party spirit reveals its true nature. It interprets God's word in justification of the partisan position, substitutes the interpretation for revelation, then demands acquiescence in the arbitrary interpretation as the word of God, and disfellowships all who refuse to do obeisance to such tyranny of mind and thought.

The eternal purpose of God was "set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him" (Eph. 1:9, 10). Schism and division are condemned. Disciples are to forbear one another in love. They are to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). The saints have been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), and this is the fellowship of the Spirit (Phil. 1:1) because "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). But the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the party spirit, being a work of the flesh, is opposed to the unity of the Spirit. Instead of being eager to maintain such, it is zealous to destroy it.

I have watched with amazement as men have taken the word of the Spirit, revealed to secure and maintain unity, and used it to sanction and defend division and disunity. It has been screened to find some scriptural reference to justify perpetuation of a partisan alliance, and erection of human standards and opinions as tests of fellowship. One would think the chief aim of the Christian was to proclaim division and practice disfellowship, and the highest moral attainment is reached when one is the most forward exponent of factionalism. There is not one scripture given by God for the purpose of tearing and rending the body of His Son. But even God could not give a revelation that was safe from maltreatment by partisans.

I propose an examination of one frequently used passage. I shall demonstrate how it has been perverted. I shall show that it has been made to imply exactly opposite to what it says. Attention is called to Romans 16:17. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them." This is the rallying ground of every faction in the disciple brotherhood. Upon the basis of this passage humble saints have been hounded out and driven forth when they refused to surrender their God given liberties and freedom to some despotic clique. Honest, sincere, God fearing men and women, have been "marked"

and branded, stigmatized and calumniated, for no other crime than daring to think for themselves. This is the one “sin” no party can tolerate, for the party spirit thrives on suppression and boycott, on ostracism and exclusion.

What is “the doctrine which you have learned”? In each instance, it is the shibboleth of the party, the password to the inner circle. In one case it is opposition to Bible classes; in another to individual cups; in still others, opposition to instrumental music, colleges, orphan homes, tuning forks, missionary societies, charitable organizations, or premillennialism. The *vital doctrine* is different with each party. If you are baptized in Texas and “your hap is to light” in a congregation which uses only fermented wine in the Lord’s Supper, and if you mature in your thinking until you express the opinion that it makes no difference whether the fruit of the vine is fermented or not, such an opinion will be construed as “causing division and offence contrary to the doctrine you have learned” and you will be castigated publicly with no chance for reply, marked and avoided. You are dangerous to the peace and safety of “the fermented wine party.”

If you find yourself in a congregation which makes an opinion about teaching classes a test of fellowship, you should cease to study or reason, for if you come to the conclusion that an opinion about Bible classes is not God’s eternal criterion of acceptability or rejection, and so express yourself, you will be marked and avoided. If you hold a secret notion that instrumental music in public worship is not necessarily a sign of rank apostasy, and that those who use it may be your brethren, you had better keep it secret in a lot of places, for if you state it merely as an opinion, and with no thought of changing the existing practice that will be all for you, except marking and avoiding you as a moral leper, or a contagious criminal.

### **What Had They Learned?**

Did the apostle have reference to such an unspiritual hodgepodge when he wrote the Romans? Of course not! Then what did he mean? Read the passage again! “Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned.” The doctrine they had learned was not to cause divisions and offences. In Chapter 12:5, they had learned they were one body, and members one of another. In 12:10 they had learned to love one another with brotherly affection, and outdo one another in showing honor. In 12:16 they had learned to live in harmony with one another. In 13:13 they had learned to conduct themselves becomingly, and not in quarreling and jealousy.

In 14:1 they had learned they should welcome one who was weak in faith, but not for disputes over opinions. In 14:13 they had learned not to pass judgment on a brother, and never place a stumbling-block or occasion to fall in a brother’s way. In 14:19 they had learned to follow after peace and things wherewith one might edify one another. In the face of all this doctrine, or teaching, about love, unity, forbearance, and mercy, if someone still caused division or offence by refusing to receive a brother, or by intolerance for one whose opinion differed, such a person was to be marked and avoided. It was not the holding of an opinion that was contrary to the doctrine, for the doctrine was, “Welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions.” The doctrine they had learned was “one believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables.” It was not necessary for all to believe alike, or to be agreed upon every point, to be welcomed.

It was contrary to the doctrine to cause divisions and offences. Brethren were to be welcomed in spite of opinions, not driven out because of them. Who was to be marked and avoided? It was the

schismatic who caused division by refusing to accept as brethren those whose opinions differed, for such division was contrary to the doctrine which said to receive them and not sit in judgment upon their opinions. There are two kinds of schismatics. One injects his opinion about a thing and seeks to build a party around it; the other sets up an unwritten law in which he makes opposition to such an opinion his test of fellowship. Either of these will cause division contrary to the doctrine which says to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The apostle was not talking about classes, containers for the fruit of the vine, baptisteries, tuning forks, colleges, orphan homes, missionary societies, fermented wine, unleavened bread, a special way of breaking the loaf, instrumental music, the premillennial theory, and all that host of things used as the occasion for splitting, shivering and riving the churches of the saints into splinters and fragments. These may, or may not, be wrong, but the apostle has no reference to them here. The doctrine we have learned is that it is sinful to hate, judge, despise and divide the brethren. Without realizing it, every partisan who has used Romans 16:17, to justify his pet division, and condone his unwritten creed, has pronounced his own condemnation by quoting this verse.

“Take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them.” We have lived to see a day in which men bitterly oppose those who plead for unity of all believers in Jesus, and blindly follow party leaders who teach division and schism as if such were a cardinal doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The most popular man in many pulpits is the one who will breathe out venom and spite against those who seek to draw all men unto Him. We are filled with fears and frustrations, bred by the party spirit. We are afraid to call men brethren, lest we forfeit our partisan standing. Our hearts are shriveled and dried up. We build walls because we feel safe behind them. We cannot face the full glare of the sunlight of love. We are dwellers in the shadows. No one is more obnoxious to the partisan forces in Christendom than he who truly seeks to answer the prayer of God’s Son. The person who most disturbs any sectarian is the man who refuses to be one.

Fellowship is not endorsement of another’s views. It is not agreement with opinions of another, but love for the person which transcends his views and yours. It is a state or relationship in Jesus. We are called into fellowship by the gospel. Nothing should ever be made a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. We do not come into the fellowship by agreement upon opinions; we should not disrupt it because of disagreement over such. If fellowship in Christ was conditioned upon perfect agreement, there would be no place for forbearance, and the instruction to “forbear one another in love” would be useless. Forbearance is never exercised toward those who see everything as you do.

We do not arrive at fellowship because we agree on things, but being in fellowship we seek to arrive at agreement on things. The unity of the Spirit is the oneness produced by the fact that the Spirit dwells in each of us. We are thus linked to each other because we are linked with God. The Spirit is not the word of God. The unity of the Spirit is not based upon perfect understanding of the words of the Spirit. It is not a unity maintained by those who have arrived, but it is God dwelling in those who are striving upward. It is maintained by a love for God and all of His children which transcends any opinion or partisan view.

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Chapter 28

## Two Great Errors

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

### The First Error

The fundamental error in our thinking as a people came when we confused the restoration movement with the church of God. The church is a divine organism; the restoration movement was a project originated by men at a given period in the history of the church. Its purpose was not to restore the church to earth, for the church never ceased to exist on earth. The temple of God has never been razed, the body of Christ has never died, the family of God has never become extinct. The announced purpose was to “restore unity, peace and purity *to the whole church of God.*” True, the church was rent by schism, and the people of God were a scattered flock but that same condition prevails even now!

When Thomas Campbell wrote “The Declaration and Address,” there was not a separate party anywhere which was called by the distinctive title “Church of Christ” and there had been no such organization for centuries. Even after the Campbells and their co-laborers were driven out of the Presbyterian and Baptist communions, they formed no party under this title. Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone united their forces as the result of a meeting held in Lexington, Kentucky in 1832. Campbell preferred the name “Disciples” while Stone preferred “Christians.” Eventually the terms “Christian Church” and “Church of Christ” were used interchangeably. It remained for David Lipscomb in 1906 while writing in reply to an enquiry from the United States Census Bureau to bring about a separate listing under the title “Church of Christ.”

It is obvious that there is a difference between the church of Christ and “The Church of Christ” just as there is a difference between the church of God and “The Church of God” in our time. The church of Christ embraces within it every saved person on earth. There is not a child of God outside of it. This is not the case with “The Church of Christ” as it came to be so designated among the religious bodies covered by the census. Indeed there are now some twenty-five parties which wear this title and with few exceptions each of these regards itself as the one holy, catholic and apostolic church of God on earth, while repudiating the claims of all the others. The exclusive attitude of these is an indication of the party spirit which motivates them.

The church of Christ was in existence before the days of Alexander Campbell. He was a member of it even while he was allied with the Redstone and Mahoning Associations of the Baptist Church. But “The Church of Christ” as that title is now employed designates a party in Christendom which grew out of the reformatory work launched by the Campbells. The members of this party confusing it with the church of God now deny that there are Christians in the sects and most of them refuse to regard as brethren in the Lord those who are affiliated with segments of the same movement. Instead of laboring to unite the Christians in all sects they frequently divide and separate from each other, setting up rival parties in the same area, thus adding to the confusion in the religious realm. Some of them go so far as to argue for reimmersion of those who come to them from other parties

of the movement. Thus has the spirit of sectarianism crystallized in new tests of fellowship and unwritten creeds.

## A Second Error

Another tragic mistake was made when men lost the distinction between the good news of Christ and the apostles' doctrine. This affected the congregation of saints in a vital way, since it set up knowledge of a system instead of faith in a person as the primary ground of admission to the fellowship. The gospel was to be preached; the doctrine was to be taught. The first was a message announced to the world to bring men into a relationship with Christ; the second was a course of instruction for training those in the Lord. Alexander Campbell early saw the importance of the distinction and wrote:

**“Preaching the gospel and teaching the converts are as distinct and distinguishable employments as enlisting an army and training it or as creating a school and teaching it. Unhappily, for the church and the world, this distinction, if at all conceded as legitimate, is obliterated or annulled in almost all protestant Christendom. The public heralds of Christianity, acting as missionaries or evangelists, and the elders or pastors of Christian churches are indiscriminately denominated preachers or ministers; and whether addressing the church or the world, they are alike preaching or ministering some things they call Gospel. ...They seem to have never learned the difference between preaching and teaching.”**

Because of the fatal errors arising from confusion at this point Campbell was insistent that a return to the vocabulary of the Spirit must include a proper understanding of the distinction between these words. In *Popular Lectures and Addresses* he said:

**“The difference between preaching and teaching Christ, so palpable in the apostolic age, though now confounded in the theoretic theologies of our day, must be well defined and clearly distinguished in the mind, in the style and utterance of an evangelist or missionary who would be a workman that need not to blush, a workman covetous of the best gifts and of the richest rewards...”**

The difference between the good news which was to be proclaimed and the system of doctrine which must be interpreted and taught is clearly marked in an article in *Millennial Harbinger* for April, 1862:

**“We preach, or report, or proclaim news. But who teaches news? Who exhorts it? We preach the gospel to unbelievers, to aliens, but never to Christians, or to those who have received it. Paul taught the Christians; he admonished, exhorted, commanded and reprovved Christians, and on some occasions declared the glad tidings to them who had received them, but who seemed to have forgotten them, as he wrote the Corinthians.”**

Let me explain why it is so important to the community of saints to recognize and maintain this distinction. Jesus commissioned the apostles to proclaim the gospel to all creation. He declared that those who believe and are immersed will be saved. Salvation from past sins and introduction into the fellowship is conditioned upon belief of *the gospel*. The gospel consists of facts related to

Jesus Christ. That which must be believed in order to salvation is that Jesus is the Messiah and God's Son.

Many today have been conditioned to think that the entire scope of the new covenant scriptures constitutes the gospel. They regard the letters addressed to churches and individuals as part of the gospel. Since one must believe the gospel in order to be saved it follows that one must understand and accept their reasoning and interpretation of every point of doctrine to be recognized as a child of God. We must never overlook the fact that the partisan spirit always substitutes the interpretation of God's word for the word itself and demands conformity not just to what God says but to what the party deduces he meant when he said it. This completely alters the Christian system. It makes salvation dependent upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge rather than upon faith in a person.

This has been the real root of division within all Christendom. It is the basis of most controversy among sincere religionists. It is the ground of orthodoxy which has been used to stifle all original thought and hound out as traitors all honest dissenters. It is the rock upon which every restoration movement in history has run aground and been battered to pieces. The Campbells clearly understood this and labored to offset it in advance. They did this by two methods. First, they carefully defined the terms essential to entrance into the fellowship, showing what was involved in faith. In the second place they carefully pointed out that unanimity of opinion, interpretation or knowledge in doctrinal matters could never be made a proper foundation for unity.

With reference to the first, Alexander Campbell wrote in *The Christian System* as follows:

**“But the grandeur, sublimity and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted of this – that the belief of one fact ... is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes to salvation. The belief of this one fact, and submission to one institution expressive of it, is all that is required of heaven to admission into the church.”**

That there may be no question as to what is meant by this language, Campbell proceeds to explain further:

**“The one fact is expressed in a single proposition – that Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah. The institution is baptism into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Every such person is a disciple in the fullest sense of the word, the moment he has believed this fact ... and has submitted to the abovementioned institution; and whether he believes the five points condemned, or the five points approved, by the Synod of Dort, is not so much as to be asked of him: whether he holds any of the views of the Calvinists or Arminians, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, or Quakers, is never once to be asked of such persons, in order to admission into the Christian community called the church.”**

Having come to a realization through observation and study, that fellowship in Christ can never be made contingent upon conformity in interpretation, Thomas Campbell expressed this idea in his “Declaration and Address.” The careful student will be amazed at the wisdom exhibited in his statement. It places reasoning and research in proper perspective. The right of every individual to go directly to the sacred writings for himself and the concomitant right to form conclusions based

upon personal investigation is asserted. It is conceded that when deductive reasoning is fairly done the concepts may be called the doctrine of God's word. But it is asserted that these concepts are not *formally* binding upon the consciences of Christians except as they are grasped and understood to be truth.

I must confess that I studied this matter for years before I caught the significance of the word "formally." Every man who sets to his seal that God is true thereby obligates himself to accept all truth as revealed by God. But the nature of man necessitated that revelation be given gradually and progressively – "line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little." Revelation has been perfected but man has not. His knowledge and understanding of truth must also be gradual and progressive. He must "grow in grace and knowledge of the truth." Every man in Christ sustains a *moral* obligation to the Creator to accept all truth as it is revealed to his consciousness to be truth. Because of his frailty and imperfection some things may appear to be truth in one stage of development which will need to be discarded in the brightness of greater light.

No two of us possess the same degree of mental aptitude. We are at various stages of growth and intellectual attainment. It would violate conscience to be forced to acknowledge as truth that which cannot be personally established as truth. To take the reasoning of one individual or group and bind that *formally* upon all others, even those who have not as yet been able to arrive at the same conclusions, is to do an injustice to the human spirit and is a violation of the Christian ethic. Such matters must not be made terms of fellowship but belong to the edification of the members of the body in love.

It would be as absurd to demand conformity of all to a higher degree of attainment in a system conditioned upon progression in knowledge as to demand it in a world requiring progression in revelation. In other words, one could as justifiably demand that Isaac and Jacob understand the epistle to the Romans in order to be saved as to demand that every person in the fellowship of Christ fully grasp all that is implied in chapter twenty of the Revelation letter to be saved. Every child of God is *morally* bound by his relationship to Jesus to accept all truth as he becomes aware of it but the relationship we sustain to each other does not convey the right to *formally* bind our interpretations upon each other. Any such coercion and compulsion of spirit must result in faith in the wisdom of men. All that we have thus stated is contained in a few simple sentences written by Thomas Campbell in these words:

**"That although inferences and deductions from the Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the conscience of Christians further than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so, for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but properly do belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession."**

It has been the fate of most religious reformations "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men *in Christ* are created equal" to fall into the hands of ambitious men who manipulate them to the achievement of their own ends. Men desire the blessings of freedom without accepting the responsibilities associated therewith. It is easier to abdicate our share in the royal priesthood than to serve in our capacity. As any such movement grows its adherents moved

by frantic fear for its survival come to depend more and more upon methods devised by human ingenuity and less and less upon the providential care of God.

Almost without exception every reformation inaugurated to free men from the dominance of a clergy has ended up with a clergy of its own. The clerical spirit thrives on the party spirit and is sustained by it. The clergymen become the authorized interpreters of the oracles of God. By subtle means the average man becomes convinced that he cannot understand the will of the Lord so he relegates this to professionals, trained specialists. By the same token the doctrinal interpretations of these must be accepted without question. To doubt the clergy is to disbelieve God. The Romish church set up an infallible interpreter. Most of the parties growing out of the Restoration Movement believe they have an infallible interpretation. The last is actually worse than the first for belief in an infallible interpreter will at least preserve unity. The Roman Catholic Church today is one of the most tightly knit organizations in the world. An infallible interpretation substitutes party dogmas for papal decrees and is productive of division every time someone discovers additional truth.

Perhaps it was a realization of the dangers inherent in dogmatism and orthodoxy that prompted Thomas Campbell to reject doctrinal knowledge and conformity as the basis for Christian fellowship. Of course he was also motivated by a clear conception of the foundation of communion expressed by God. One reads with wonder and amazement the safeguards thrown about truth and his heart is saddened to see how his own brethren by deviating from these announced principles have not only failed the restoration movement but have become sectarian in doing so. Consider the following clear statement as found in the "Declaration and Address":

**"That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths and defensive testimonies, in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes the better; yet, as these must be, in a great measure, the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion, unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information, whereas the church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers."**

There is no use denying that the heirs of the great project to "unite the Christians in all the sects" is now "in evil case." The two errors in thought with which we have been dealing are not the only ones which foster the partisan spirit that has fragmented and fractionalized us. We have referred to them in this treatise primarily because the first confuses the nature of the church of God while the second confuses the nature of the message of God. These are fundamental. It was because of these two grave errors in the religious world that the "Declaration and Address" was written. That document was clear upon these issues. It is a sad and tragic thing that we have now made a full circle and are once more involved in sectarianism of our own creation because we have lost the truths enunciated so many years ago.

Unless there is a reversal of attitude and a change of philosophy "the Churches of Christ" can only look forward to a grim future of strife, contention and division. These various parties contain within themselves the seeds of schism and they will "multiply and fill the earth after their kind."

There will be little of a constructive nature contributed to the distressed and distraught realm of Christendom.

## Conclusion

Certain conditions existed in the early part of the nineteenth century which called for inauguration of a reformatory movement. Sincere men who loved the Lord could no longer continue to go deeper and deeper into the welter of sectarianism. Creeds and parties were multiplying. God's children were separated and segregated from each other. They were enemies instead of friends. Alexander Campbell wrote thus:

**“Tired of new creeds and new parties in religion, and of the numerous abortive efforts to reform the reformation; convinced from the Holy Scriptures, from observation and experience, that the union of the disciples of Christ is essential to the conversion of the world, and that the correction and improvement of no creed or partisan establishment in Christendom, could ever become the basis of such a union, communion and cooperation, as would restore peace to a church militant against itself, or triumph to the common salvation; a few individuals, about the commencement of the present century, began to reflect upon the ways and means to restore primitive Christianity.”**

The same situation now prevails among the heirs of the restoration movement. If that movement was the answer to the tragic state existing in the early part of the previous century is it not the answer to the same tragic state existing in the last half of the twentieth century? Is it not time once more that a few individuals begin to reflect upon ways and means? In short, is it not time to restore the spirit of restoration?

(This is part of a treatise, *“Restoring Restoration”*, *Mission Messenger*: Vol. 23, No. 8; Aug. 1961.)

Chapter 29

## Union in Truth

*Leroy Garrett*

Our pioneers had a way with slogans. Most of our readers could recall two or three of them, such as *Let Christian unity be our polar star* or *Christ our only creed* or *In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love*. One can get a fairly good grasp of the nature of their “Plea,” as they called it, by examining their many slogans.

This one is especially pregnant with meaning. *Union in truth!* While we sometime distinguish between union and unity, they used the terms synonymously, and I think rightly so. Some versions of the Bible use them interchangeably. Unity is union and union is unity. *Unity must be in truth*. This they believed, and I suppose we would all agree. I have not met the first person who advocates *unity in error*.

While all persuasions among us believe that unity (or union) must be in truth, we differ on the meaning of both terms. Some see unity as agreement on some set of doctrines, which equates unity with conformity. Others of us see it as based upon relationship, marriage being a good example. Husband and wife may not agree on some things, but they are one or united in their marriage. Peter and Paul may have had their differences, but they were nonetheless united in Christ. If unity must mean agreement on all points, then we may presume that unity is very rarely attained. The fact that Eph. 4:2 makes “forbearing one another in love” a means of preserving unity would imply that there can be oneness amidst disagreement and differences. If unity is a matter of seeing everything alike, what is there to forbear? There is no need for love to hide a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8) if we all have to see everything alike.

We have just as much of a problem with the meaning of *truth*. Yes, we all agree that unity must be in truth, but we make truth include all our petty party claptrap. Some make *not* eating in the church building a matter of truth. And I have just read an account by Adron Doran in *The World Evangelist* of one of our old churches in Kentucky. It was first a Christian Church, he explains, but a half century or so ago an instrument was introduced and was used for some years. I noted with interest that it was called a Christian Church both before and after they used the instrument. But someone convinced them that the instrument was a sin, so it was moved out. He also told them that they should change their name to Church of Christ. While this has all the marks of a church moving from one party to another, we are assured that this was a matter of *truth* – including the name Church of Christ! Does this mean that the congregation was *not* a Church of Christ and not “walking according to truth,” when it was called a Christian Church and yet noninstrumental?

It illustrates how we get ourselves into trouble when we presume to determine the parameters of truth. *Union in truth* has no meaning if “truth” is made to include everybody’s opinion.

Dr. Robert Richardson was one of the pioneers who was careful to distinguish between truth and *the* truth. Strictly speaking, he would say, unity is in *the* truth. He noted that Pilate asked the wrong question when he asked *What is truth?* What is the truth? is the vital question, and he finds this in

the basic facts of the gospel. He observed that it has always been a “restless zeal for purity of doctrine” that has given us all the creeds. And so the church usually “saves” and “condemns” on the basis of some theory of religion. Speaking of trying to base unity upon “true doctrine” he noted: “To expect entire uniformity of sentiment in the whole minutiae of Christian doctrine is utterly visionary and futile.” He claimed that the Campbell reformation is the only instance in all Protestantism where a distinction was drawn between *truth* and the *truth*.

The basis of union, Richardson urged, is in the confession of the great fundamental truth of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is the son of God, which is the *common* faith and *the* truth. All truths are indeed true, he grants, but not all truths are equally important. *The* truth, the doctor insisted, is the gospel, and it is this that is the basis of union. This does not mean that doctrinal truths are not important, for indeed they are, but that they cannot be made the basis of union. Doctrine is for the edification of the church, while the truth is *the* basis of union.

This paragraph from Richardson’s pen should help us to see the relationship between truth and unity.

Thus in the very beginning of this effort to reform religious society, the subject matter of a saving or essential faith was distinguished both from the uninspired deductions of human reason, and from those divine teachings which, however necessary to enable the believer to make proper advances in Christian knowledge, are by no means necessary to the Christian faith.

Such distinctions should help us to better understand such Scriptures as the following:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)

“When the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.” (Jn. 16:13)

“Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.” (Jn. 18:37)

“That the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (Gal. 2:5)

“You heard the word of truth.” (Eph. 1:13)

“Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God.” (Rom. 15:8)

“God...has chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” (2 Thess. 2:13)

“That we might be fellow helpers to the truth.” (3 Jn. 8)

“To them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3)

It can hardly be concluded from such passages that the truth refers to all truth ever revealed to man, or to all the facts or truths in the Bible. It is much closer to say that the truth is centered in the Person of Christ. Even “the truth of God” refers to the great revelation of His Son. Jesus was

asking about this truth when he asked his disciples *about himself*. “Who do men say that I am?” he asked them. He was teaching them that *he* was the truth of God.

So, when one is right about Jesus – *right* in that he loves him and is loyal to him, enthroning him as the Lord of his life – he is “walking in the truth,” even though he may be either ignorant of or wrong about other truths that are subordinate to the great truth that God’s son has come into this world.

This means that *Union in truth* is unity in Jesus Christ. If you are in him and I am in him, then we are in union with each other as well as united with him. That unity will be strengthened and deepened by the great doctrinal truths. You may be several grades ahead of me in the “school of Christ” and thus know things I do not yet know. You may be right about some things that I am wrong about. But we are equal in Christ in that *the* truth has made us the children of God, once it is believed and obeyed.

Can there be any other basis of union than union in Jesus Christ?

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Chapter 30

# One Body in Christ

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

*To confess Jesus Christ is to affirm the abolition and end of division and hostility, the end of separation and segregation, the end of enmity and contempt, and the end of every sort of ghetto. Jesus Christ does not bring the victory to the man who is either on this side or that of the fence. - Markus Barth in The Broken Wall.*

The fourth chapter of Ephesians starts with our calling. That calling is our vocation. It is not how we make a living, but it is our life. And it is every facet of our daily life. Elton Trueblood in *Your Other Vocation* says that the exciting idea behind the New Testament use of “calling” is that our world is God’s world. He adds “The way in which we grow potatoes is as much a matter of God’s will as the way in which we pray or sing.”

What has happened, and it staggers imagination, is that God has called us to his side to work with him. We have heard the call and responded to it. So the life of God, eternal life, is now ours. It is not something in the “sweet by and by” but it is here in the “sweet now and now.” The goal of God has become our goal. The purpose of God is now our purpose. We have been reconciled unto God, and now we are his reconciling community. We have made peace with God and now are peacemakers. We are the children of God. This is our calling, living in Christ and with Christ, and we must walk worthy of it!

But we simply cannot labor together with God in uniting all things in Christ, that is, things which are in heaven and things which are on earth, unless we recognize the unity of the Spirit. Unity is not a human attainment at all. It is a divine attribute. It is bestowed upon us as love is bestowed upon us. We do not achieve it. We accept it. We do not accomplish it. We acknowledge it. Unity in Christ Jesus is a condition created by the Spirit. It is not a state we sponsor or a position we project. It is sharing in the divine oneness.

Unity is not subscription to a creed nor subservience to a concordat. It cannot be arranged or arrived at by an association nor created by a convention. Unity is life. It is the life of God, made available to us through our Lord, the Messiah Jesus. It is the life of the called ones, the new creation, the new humanity. Our task is to guard it and keep it in the bond of peace.

The unity involves seven items. It is these which define and describe our calling, and which give it reality. We are called into *one body*. We are called by *one Spirit*. We are called unto *one hope*. It is actually designated “the hope of our calling.” We are called to be slaves under *one Lord*. We are called by one faith, that which demands a supreme act of trust. We are called to obey in *one baptism*, the surrender of all that has been ours for all that is His in us. We are called to be children of *one God and Father*. He is superior to all, yet He shows his majesty through all and shares His glory in all!

The number seven is significant. It was the number for perfection in creation. It is the number for fullness or completeness in the new creation. The unity of the Spirit reaches its full complement in these seven. Not one can be slighted. Not one dare be left out. Any concept of unity which eliminates one of these is not the unity of the Spirit. Any concept which projects the idea of more than one in any of them is not the unity of the Spirit.

I am going to consider them separately but with a full sense of their relationship. They are not separate entities but parts of a whole. They are seven ingredients which make up one loaf of fellowship with the divine. They are seven plies which make up one cord, seven strands woven into one rope binding us to God and to one another. Each contributes strength to the whole and each derives strength from the others. We may consider them individually but only as parts of that wonderful unity – the unity of the Spirit!

### **The One Body**

I shall say some things about the one body with which many of you will not agree. I will say them because I must be honest with myself and true to my own convictions. I must give account for my own thoughts and my own words before that great judgment seat. I must stand or fall to my own Master. If you cannot concur with my views I will love you just the same. I cannot claim the freedom to do my own thinking and deny that freedom to you. You are my brothers and sisters. I cherish you in Him. But I do not forget that while you are my brothers, you are not my judges! “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by any human court” (1 Cor. 4:3). We sometimes forget that when we think we are judging what a brother says we are actually only judging ourselves. We are sitting in judgment upon our own hearts!

To save my critics, of whom there are many, a great deal of trouble, allow me to acknowledge that I have changed my thinking about the one body since I was “a boy preacher.” I no longer regard that body as a faction centering around a partisan point of emphasis, whether that point be right or wrong. I do not regard it as a denomination bearing a specific or official title and meeting behind recognized signs all stamped out with a metal “cookie cutter.” I do not think of the one body as a sect existing to exploit some theological deduction or religious philosophy.

I cannot be true to God and remain consistent with my own previous sectarian stance. I must choose between God and my own sectarian past. I have made the choice. I am going to be true to what I believe my Father would have me believe and write, just as I was true to what I thought when I was the leader of a factional school of thought that conditioned fellowship upon agreement with us.

*There is one body!* It isn't that there ought to be one body. It isn't that we are striving toward one body. There is one body! There is one body exactly as there is one Spirit, or one Lord. And if that body is the called-out community, there is only one such community. There has never been another and there never will be another. All of the called are in that body. It is composed of all the elect of all the earth. The one body is a divine creation, not a human contrivance. Man can no more create another body than he can create another Spirit or another Lord. There will never be another body to siphon off some of the called-out ones. The community of the reconciled is one.

The one body is not a sect. The very word sect implies more than one. No sect of believers in Christ is old enough to be the one body. No sect is large enough or comprehensive enough to be the one body. The Holy Spirit never created a sect and no one was ever baptized into a sect by the Spirit. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This was written to a group of saints who were fractured by schism and separated by the sectarian spirit. They could not even eat the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit put them into one body. They separated themselves into parties. They were members of one body separated by schisms and rent by prejudices. The apostle did not deny that they were members of one body. He simply condemned their partisan alignments which made it so difficult for the unity of the Spirit to shine through.

Just as the one body is not a sect, so it is not a coalition of sects. All modern sects are postapostolic. The one body preceded them so it could not have been composed of them. If all modern sects came together in a federation, that federation would not be the one body. It would simply be one society of many sects. Sects serve no purpose except to divide. They are demonstrations of a work of the flesh. We should not be laboring for their union but for their death. They are fungus growths and parasites. They should be chloroformed, not combined. They claim to exalt Jesus but they exalt opinions and seek to parcel Jesus out. They confine consecration to creeds, and insist that everyone survey the wondrous cross through their theological knotholes. Let creeds be cast to the moles and bats, and let the sects which have crystallized around them wither and die. The one body is the work of the Holy Spirit, sects are the fruit of the party spirit!

The body of Christ is not a conglomerate of congregations, all of which are stereotypes and often sterile reproductions of one another. Congregations in apostolic days were not all alike. Their unity was in Christ. Jesus was their pattern. The seven congregations in Asia Minor were all different from one another. If they had not been one letter would have sufficed for the lot. They were different in problems if not otherwise.

Some of them were pretty scroungy but they were all God had in a pagan culture, and although the light shone dimly Jesus did not snuff it out. These congregations did not constitute the body of Christ in Asia, because the one body is not composed of congregations. There were members of the body in every one of them and these were to walk with Jesus in white. You might as well try to unite all of the sects with a written creed as to try and unite all of the congregations with an unwritten one.

## **A Rock House**

God's temple is composed of stones. The only kind of house he has on earth is a rock house. It is built on earth which he laid as a sure foundation. It is built out of rocks he has called to life with him. They are living stones. But the stones will differ from one part of the earth to another. God has to use the rocks that are at hand. A rock house in the Ozarks is likely to be made out of field stones. There are plenty of them. One in Indiana is likely to be made of Bedford limestone. But they are both stone houses.

The living stones God employs in Africa will differ from those he uses in Asia or Australia. Their culture will be different. Some of the living stones in Africa may get up and stomp around and clap their hands while they praise God, while in Texas they may sit in the corner of the pews and doze while the preacher cranks away at "the five items of worship." But whether they wake or sleep,

whether they jump or tiptoe, if they are living stones, they are builded together as a habitation of God for the Spirit!

Even in the United States the congregations that are made up of “living stones” are not all alike. Some are more lively than others. I know, because I visit them all. I go to some places where a lot of the stones have university degrees and sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*, or “O Sacred Head” from Bach’s *Passion According to Matthew*. I also go where some folks, like myself, had a hard time getting through high school, and they sing “An Empty Mansion” from *Joyful Songs*, or “Farther Along” from *Starlit Crown* by the StampsBaxter Music Company. But I love them all, whether they are Johann Sebastian Bach or Albert Brumley types. They are my brothers and sisters. I’m thrilled they love my Father even if they are not all alike! I do not head for the door if some of them close their eyes and lift up holy hands while they are singing. They all sing what is meaningful to them whether it’s meaningful to anyone else or not.

The body of Christ is not composed of movements in history, although it is affected by them, because it exists in the time-space spectrum in which historical movements operate. We are a pretty good example of what happens when you confuse a movement with the body of which Jesus is the head. Most of us are heirs of one of about sixteen restoration movements. A lot of them started about the same time, and all of them splintered and shivered into fragments. Many of them divided over the very same problems and at the same time in history. Some of them did not get to first base and others exploded on the way to second. When they came down they thought it was home plate and made the mistake of thinking they had arrived and everyone else had departed.

The body never died and it did not have to be restored. Good Presbyterians like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone and Walter Scott, thought there must be a better way to please God than by splitting a splinter off every time someone came up with a new theological slant, so they inaugurated “a project to unite the Christians in all of the sects.” They failed to unite all of the Christians, because of what Alexander Campbell called “creed parties” in the sects. But we came along and argued that what they had done was to restore the church, and there were no Christians left in the sects to unite. Those who were Christians came with us, and those who did not come with us were not Christians. Thus, the restoration movement was transformed into “the Lord’s church” by our semantics. We fooled ourselves into believing that. We did not fool the Lord. I doubt that we fooled the Baptists when the “Reformers” pulled out of the Mahoning Association, after having previously left the Redstone Baptist Association because of rejection of their plea!

The one body is not the restoration movement and the restoration movement is not the one body. The body is bigger than any movement. It is greater than all of them put together. God knows how great it is, but no one on earth does. You can number the Disciples of Christ party, the Christian Church party and the Church of Christ party. You can compare figures and even gleefully juggle them in a kind of suppressed hostile rivalry, but you can no more count the redeemed on earth while they are scattered than you can in heaven when they are all together. John said, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great crowd! And no one was able to count it – out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues!”

It doesn’t bother me that I cannot count that high. I do not need to know who they all are. The Lord knoweth them that are his! Once I knew all who were saved. It wasn’t a big job back in those

days. The kingdom of heaven wasn't very large. It centered mainly in the mid-western part of the United States. That was because that section of the world was fortunate enough to have us in it. I even helped put out a directory of "faithful churches." It was one of about a dozen such directories and there were no duplications in them. Ours was always being "gummed up" by congregations being persuaded to "leave the faith" and "apostatize," which meant going over with some of the others. Of course, we captured our share and messed their directories up also. Being faithful had nothing to do with really pleasing Jesus. It was parroting the party line!

What a relief it is now to be free from all of that and to belong only to Jesus. What a privilege it is to be allowed to stand or fall to your own master and to let everyone else do the same. I grew up in a factional world where preachers of the word were constantly being called to referee congregational dogfights, or coming from far and near to examine, catechize or tighten the screws upon someone who had learned better and was changing his mind. I was a part of such inquisitions and I am ashamed of it. I know now that the party always skims off the brains from the top. Only the thinkers are driven out! The bland conformists who either do not reason, or play politics and keep their mouths closed, stay in and become the party greats! Actually, it has come to the point in a lot of places where the best recommendation you can have is that the local congregation has excluded you!

Jesus did not die to purchase a party to oppose support of the Herald of Truth. He did not die to purchase one to promote it either. He did not shed his blood for an instrument party or a non-instrument party, for an "organic" faction or an "inorganic" faction. Jesus did not suffer and bleed for a Sunday School faction or an anti-Sunday School faction. All parties which are exclusivistic are cooked up by men. They are brewed from unwritten creeds and simmered in opinions. All of them put together would not constitute the one body. That body has many parts, but no parties. And I am no longer interested in any party, promotion, schism or sect. I am interested in Jesus and I am willing to share that interest and my life (which is his) with anyone who exalts his lordship!

## **The Body Constituency**

The one body is composed of individuals. "Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). The parts are persons. Every saved person on this whole earth is in the one body. There is not one redeemed saint outside of it. God has set them all in the body as it pleased Him. He has tempered the body together. It is not a human organization but a divine organism.

The body is God at work in the world, in space and time, as he was at work in Christ. As the living word became flesh then, so now the revealed word becomes our flesh, and God is now in us reconciling the world unto himself. We are his reconciling agents, his earthen vessels, filled with his fullness, and serving the divine purpose for the divine end. I am an organ of God. My fleshly body is an arm of God, or a leg of God, or a tongue of God.

Every child of God in the world, every son and daughter of the Lord Almighty, is in the one body, and is my brother or sister. I am one with all of them. But I am only one with them through Him. Our unity is in Christ. Even though others who are in Him do not recognize their oneness with me, I recognize it with them. I did not arrange it. I simply accept it. When God received them I received them. If he took them in with their hostility toward me I will take them the same way. It

is not necessary that they recognize me. It is only necessary that they accept him. If they do that we stand together in him whether we stand together on things or not.

I am not so concerned with what they have in their minds as I am concerned with who they have in their hearts. The Holy Spirit can dwell in some pretty ignorant people. If He cannot it will be “Katy, bar the door” for a lot of us, and we will be standing outside in our ignorance looking in, instead of standing inside in our ignorance looking out. None of us know too much, and if we brag about what we do know, we prove it! “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. But if anyone thinks he knows anything, he has not known anything as he ought to know it” (1 Cor. 8:1,2).

The apostle adds to that, “But if anyone loves God, he is known by him.” Praise the Lord! The one body is not composed of those who have scored a passing grade on a theological comprehension test. It is not made up of those who have attained a certain intellectual status. It is not how much you know but who you know. “And this is life everlasting, that they should know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Everlasting life is a personal relationship. It is not a memory feat. You can be a member of the body and not know one letter of the alphabet from another. You can be a member of it and not be able to write your own name. Cheer up! If you know him like I know him your name will be written down in glory where the Lamb keeps the book of life.

I refuse to allow any sectarian wall to debar me from any of my brethren. Such walls are not real. God did not construct a one of them. They are monuments to human pride and arrogance. They stand because of vain traditions which love the praise of men more than the praise of God. They are all artificial. They are all superficial. But they are not there for one who ignores them. There are no sectarian walls except in human hearts and my heart has been purged from the party spirit by the crimson stream flowing from Immanuel’s veins.

God does not want great lawyers, but grace-filled lovers. “The law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” If I follow Jesus my task is not to lay down the law but to take grace and truth to men. My only principle of action is the Spirit of life. To take that spirit to men I must leave my comfortable little heaven and make myself vulnerable. I must go where I would rather not go because that is where he leads. I must drink of a cup which I would rather have pass away, because that is what he did. I cannot wait until men see things as I do or agree with me. On that basis he would never have left heaven and come to earth. I must go among my brethren, all of them, for if I refuse to do that I will be guilty of the works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit will wither and die. I want my watchword to be, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and tumult and evil speaking be put away from you, along with all evil hearted feelings, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God forgave you in Christ.”

I think that when one changes his view of the one body as I have changed mine, he ought to be frank, open and explicit. He should be willing to bear the brunt of attack which will be directed toward him. He should steel himself inwardly for false accusation and expect his motives to be maligned. Satan does not easily surrender one who has been steeped in the party spirit. Freedom is never cheap and liberty has its price. But I want to be understood. I have no desire to equivocate, no intention of concealing my views.

## One In Christ

There is one body! It is composed of every sincere immersed believer on earth. Every person who believes with all of his heart that Jesus is the Messiah, and God's Son, and is immersed because of that faith has been baptized into Christ. His sins are forgiven and he receives the Holy Spirit as God's gift. Every such person is a member of the one body by an act of God. If he suffers I suffer with him. If he rejoices I rejoice with him. The one body is not circumscribed by the limits of the noninstrument Church of Christ. It is not restricted to any one of its two dozen parties, nor to all of them put together. The body of Christ does not appear in the list of religious organizations in the United States Census Bureau report. It will never appear there!

I believe in the restoration principle and ideal. I am convinced that renewal must come as it has come in other periods of history. It can only come through recovery of the apostolic proclamation, purpose and power. The position held by the twelve apostles was unique. They still hold it. They have no successors to their office. They were envoys of the King and their writings are authoritative in my life. God set them in the church first. The foundation they laid is the one upon which I shall continue to build. I have neither time nor respect for any theory which sets aside the new covenant scriptures as the basis for my whole life. But I know the difference between the restoration movement started by good men and the one body created by the living God.

For me the revelation of God is complete. I hold no brief for modern prophetic utterances, whether given by Joseph Smith or my own brethren. The new covenant scriptures are perfect for their purpose and their purpose is to make us perfect – unto every good work. They are not a written code of legal requirements, but a collection of love letters for believers. They do not so much represent the will of God imposed as the heart of God exposed. They are not an indication of the Father cracking a whip but extending His hand to help in time of need. Reading the apostolic letters I am able to think God's thoughts after him. I can draw nigh to him so that he can draw nigh to me. And he never fails to do so!

Yes, there is one body, and there is only one! God is its creator, Jesus is its head, the Holy Spirit is its life, and all who are sanctified and justified are its members, its organs in the world. Jerusalem which is above is free and she is the mother of us all. We are children of promise and not of a slave woman. We are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. As many! Every person on this earth who was baptized into Christ Jesus has put him on! The extent of the body is determined by the number of those who have put on Christ Jesus by being baptized into him. I am convinced there are multiplied thousands of them of whom I have never heard. But I will see them in the grand reunion, the great festival of the home going! What a gathering from every nation, clime and tongue!

The saints have put on the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created that new man. They are the elect of God and they are complete in the fullness of him who is the head of all rule and authority. I am one of that number, a sinner saved by grace which is so startling that I have not begun to understand it. I want to be found in him, not knowing my own righteousness, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness of God which is by faith. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection.

It still seems almost unbelievable that He stooped down and took me up in the everlasting arms along with all the rest of you who have set to your seal that God is true. But I thank him and praise him, that unworthy as I was, he came looking for me and did not stop calling until I answered and he found me. There is room in the body for all of us who love him. It is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the community of the reconciled ones, and may all of us who are in it be reconciled to one another as we have been to Him. Let us be drawn closer by the atoning blood which flowed for all!

*(Mission Messenger: Vol. 36, No. 7; July 1974)*

## Chapter 31

# Unity and Identity

*W. Carl Ketcherside*

Will our plea for unity of all believers in Christ cause the church to lose its identity? This is an objection frequently heard. Like many other accusations it proves to be absurd when examined in the light of reason. Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers. He also planted the church. Would he pray for that which, if it came to pass, would destroy the identity of the church?

How can the church lose its identity? It is the body of Christ. He is the head of the body and the Saviour of the church. As a head, Jesus would have no significance without the body, just as the body would have no significance without Jesus. If the church should cease to be, Jesus would cease to exist as a head. That which makes him a head is his relationship to the body. So long as the head lives the body cannot die; and so long as the body lives it can be identified. That which identifies the church is its connection with Jesus. It cannot lose its identity unless it is severed from Jesus. But if it is severed from Jesus it is not the church and he is not a head.

Unconsciously, those who voice a fear the church will lose its identity under the impact of our discussions on fellowship reveal that they are really members of a sect. It is plainly stated by Jesus that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. In plain language this means that the church which he planted can never lose its identity. Now, if the church of our Lord cannot lose its identity and the institution to which our objectors belong can lose its identity it is evident that there is a difference between the former and latter.

The truth is that our brethren have confused the party to which they are attached with the church of God. They are frightened by the thought all of God's children may become one, and thus put an end to their party as well as all other factions. Since they look upon their faction as the church that would be equivalent to the church losing its identity. One of the fruits of the party spirit is fear – blind, unreasoning fear. Men build walls about themselves and feel secure within their narrow confines. They lose their love for freedom. With their wings kept closely cropped by tradition and penned up inside their interpretative fences they are no longer adapted to the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

They surrender love of truth for dogmatism and barter hope of grace for legalism. Removed from the main channel of religious thought where the current flows freely they drift into bayous and sloughs where they mistake stagnation for faithfulness and placidity for loyalty. In time they come to believe that the marsh is the stream and that to dry it up would be to destroy the river. But just as a swiftly flowing stream cannot be kept within the narrow banks of a pond so truth cannot be harnessed within the limited confines of a party. When it is directed in its force against the dams men have constructed they must give way before it but this only means the merging again of the waters in the main channel.

Truth is dangerous to any party or faction. It is well for factious men to keep it out if they would keep their partisans in. They will need to apply threat and boycott if they are to survive. Every

party is built on reverence for the traditions of the fathers, therefore, has its own creed. The party exists on the basis that it has discovered, embraced and enclosed all truth. John Milton in his famous *Areopagitica*, published in 1644, points out that truth in our age is but dimly seen and imperfectly known. Those who would seek to rule with an infallible authority would confine our knowledge to this present circumference. But man has not been made to endure this tyranny. The Puritan poet writes, "The light which we have gained was given us not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge." This statement is worthy of consideration.

Every factional leader has the dream of "converting" all the members of every other faction to his own party. It is his aim and intention by coercion, to bring all into his own fold. This will never be done. The purpose of God is not served by partisan clashes or debates. All religious sectism is wrong. That includes our own. It can never be reconciled with the divine plan. It is only as the parties lose their identity and Christians divest themselves of their special brands that we will draw closer to God.

### **No Sacrifice Of Truth**

This does not require the sacrifice of a single truth by any person. We are not divided because each holds some truth but because no one of us holds it all. It is not by giving up any truth but by entering more deeply into truth that we shall find greater unity. The church will never lose its identity by searching for truth. The party which ceases to do so merely cumbers the ground. It produces no real fruit for good. It is time for all of us to realize that it is not in the defense or maintenance of parties that we serve God, but in rising above the spirit which creates such parties and gives them birth.

The church of God cannot lose its identity. This is the vain fear of those who trust in an organization rather than the divine organism. It is an indication that men walk by sight and not by faith. Can a body lose its identity while the head still lives? Can a kingdom lose its identity while its king is seated on the throne and reigns unchallenged? Can a flock lose its identity while the shepherd watches over it? Can a house lose its identity while it is recognized by its owner? Can a temple lose its identity while the Deity dwells within it?

If the exaltation of the name of Jesus as our rallying point means death to factionalism, *let it die!* If the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus for unity spells the doom of the party, *let it die!* If the advocacy of the brotherhood of all the sons of God removes the barriers, dissolves the hate and renders the sectarian spirit helpless, *let it die!* Too long have men kept the family of God apart by proclaiming that the family would lose its identity if all the children came together. Too long have they predicted that the city of God would lose its identity if the breaches in the walls were repaired.

Men created parties and men can destroy them. God created the church and men are powerless to destroy it. The grave could not retain the physical body of Jesus; it can never receive his spiritual body. Will he who notes the fall of the sparrow allow the church to perish? But we are asked if our recognition of persons in other churches as brethren will not eventually cause the church to lose its identity. There are no persons in *other churches*. There is only one church. You might as well talk of belonging to other Christs or other Gods as to talk of belonging to "other churches." If others are in a church at all they are members of the one body; if they are not members of it they are not in the

church. There are many parties but there is only one church. A man can no more start a church than he can make another God or create another Spirit. There is only one body just as there is but one Lord.

It is precisely by our formation of parties that we have obscured the church. Men “see through a glass darkly” because of our sectarian conflicts. This does not mean the church has lost its identity. It is still true that “the Lord knoweth them that are his.” It is not the man who seeks to dispel the partisan fog who beclouds the church but he who confuses factionalism with faithfulness. The church has no better friend on earth than the one who strips from its face the creedal shrouds with which men have swathed it and allows it to shine forth in the radiant and undimmed glow of spiritual oneness. No man who really believes in the purpose of God will ever entertain the thought that the bridegroom will be unable to identify his bride. Those who harbor such fears are not made perfect in love for perfect love casts out fear. Men cannot see far even on a clear day with clouded spectacles.

*(Mission Messenger: Vol. 23, No. 2; March 1961)*

Chapter 32

# Unity in Diversity

*Leroy Garrett*

There may be some game-playing in that title, a game called tautology, for *unity* by its very nature has to be diverse. It is like saying “each and everyone” when only one of those pronouns is necessary, or like *widow woman* which is bad English. Unity is a union or oneness of things that are different, like members of a family being one or a man and wife being one.

It is odd, therefore, to see some of our brethren write woefully about the “unity in diversity heresy.” Either they simply are not thinking or they have something in mind far afield of what is usually meant by the term. True, a move toward unity could be *too* diverse. “What unity has Christ with Belial?” asks the apostle, “or what union has a believer with an unbeliever?” We know of no one among us that refers to “unity in diversity” except in reference to Christians, people who are in Christ. This has been the genius of our people’s plea from the outset, *that all Christians can be united, despite differences*. No one is suggesting that we should seek unity with unbelievers, but only with other Christians, folk who love and obey Jesus Christ.

I have no interest in uniting with Methodists, Baptists, Roman or Greek Catholics, Mennonites, or whatever, but only with Christians, who are surely among these denominations as well as among ourselves. I do not even have any interest in uniting with Church of Christ or Christian Church folk, but only with true believers. It is noteworthy that the Scriptures never speak of churches or denominations uniting, but believers in Christ. I am a Campbellite on this point, for the old reformer, while not disparaging the union of sects, sought the unity of *Christians*, for that is what Jesus prayed for. He observed that there might be a unity of the churches without a unity of Christians, but never a unity of Christians without a unity of the churches, for oneness in Christ transcends and even destroys the party spirit.

Our own history is replete with instances of unity in diversity. In recent essays in this column we have recounted differences between our pioneers, whose tombs we garnish. Not only differences between themselves, which did not rupture their fellowship, but differences between their views and practices and our various party lines today. One essay contended that there would be no way for Alexander Campbell to be accepted by many Churches of Christ today since he did not believe that baptism was absolutely essential to salvation, was not himself baptized for the remission of sins, believed there were Christians in the sects, and served for some sixteen years as president of our first missionary society. Thomas Campbell could not be fellowshipped for most of the same reasons and also because he was a Calvinist in his theology.

Barton W. Stone believed in “open membership” or “ecumenical” membership, which would cause him grave difficulties among the Christian Churches as well as Churches of Christ. Many of the preachers in the Stone movement, great and good men like David Purviance, never did accept the Campbellite emphasis on “baptism for remission of sins.” They immersed believers, but did not accept or preach that doctrine, which would be enough to bar them from the faculties of our schools of preaching.

We have shown that even John W. McGarvey, who has scholarships named for him in our Church of Christ colleges, was a strong supporter of the missionary society, even if adamantly opposed to instrumental music. To be faithful in our ranks you have to be *both* antisociety and antiorgan! By the way, McGarvey was also a “one-cup” man. Now who will claim him? I will! I accept him and love him as within the fellowship of the redeemed in heaven because he is in Christ and my brother. That he believed the Supper should be served in one cup and that singing should be a cappella only has nothing whatever to do with his being within the fellowship of Christ. But I don’t like the way he treated some of his fellow editors, who are also my brothers, but I doubt if we’ll discuss those things when we meet. If so, I’m sure there would be things in my editorial ministry that he would not appreciate. If we all had to wait for mutual approbation of each other’s viewpoints to be brothers, then brotherhood would forever elude us.

There is in our history a noble instance of unity in diversity. In fact there might have been no enduring Restoration Movement had it not been for this event, the union of the Stone and Campbell movements in 1832. Had they not had much in common there would, of course, have been no union. Both groups made Christ their only creed, rejecting human names and creeds, and they made the Bible their only rule of faith and practice. They shared a passion for the unity of the church. They had both turned from sprinkling to immersion and were seeking to recover the primitive ordinances of the church.

But there were some substantial differences:

1. The Stone people were much more emotional in their preaching, even using a mourner’s bench, while the Campbell churches were more rational. Many of the former thought the latter lacked “heart religion.”
2. The Stone group had an ordained ministry, believing that only an ordained minister can baptize or serve Communion, while the other group was anticlerical and believed any Christian can serve at the Table and baptize.
3. The Stone churches wore the name Christian, believing this to be the divinely appointed name, while Campbell and his folk called themselves Disciples. This was a rather serious difference since Campbell saw “Christian” as a nickname given by the world. This was resolved by the Movement eventually using both names.
4. The Disciples from the very first Sunday at Brush Run served the Supper each first day. The Christians served Communion on a quarterly basis. The Campbell practice eventually prevailed in the united churches.
5. The Christians had a much more open view of the Spirit’s ministry in conversion and the life of the believer, as would be suggested by the mourner’s bench method. The Disciples in those early days had a “word only” view of the Spirit’s work, or something close to that. Stone said in after years that if Campbell had in his early years taught on the Spirit what he did later in life the Movement would have been much more successful.

6. The Christians were more concerned for unity, the Disciples more interested in the restoration of the ancient order. They helped each other to find a balance between the two and thus became the first people in all history to plead for unity on the basis of restoration.

These differences were as substantial as anything that divides us today, and yet they were a uniting people while we remain a dividing people. Their secret was a simple one: they learned that unity can be realized only in the *essentials* of the faith, allowing for differences in the nonessentials. This is not to say that the things they differed on were not important, but they recognized that things can be important without being essential. They worked toward more agreement, which they gradually achieved, but it was as a united people and *within* the fellowship. Had they waited until they saw everything alike, we might not have had our Movement. This bit of history, along with similar instances of unity in diversity in the New Testament itself, would help us to overcome a damaging fallacy: that we must reach agreement on everything or most everything before we can be in fellowship. Their way is better, which is the way of Scripture: Work out the differences that need to be worked out *within* the fellowship.

We have difficulty accepting disagreements among Christians as inevitable. Since the apostles themselves the church has not seen eye to eye on lots of things, some of them rather significant if not essential. Paul and Barnabas had to go their separate ways, but that doesn't mean that they "withdrew" from each other. There will always be differences among us, this side of "the millennial church" at least. It is only a question of how we are going to respond to them.

We have standing orders from the apostles: "And to all these add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. The peace that Christ gives is to be the judge in your hearts; for to this peace God has called you together in the one body" (Col. 3:14-15, TEV).

It is love that unites, not doctrinal agreement. Love *perfectly* unites that which is divided. Even if people should reach perfect agreement on all the points of doctrine, this would not mean perfect unity. Only love made for perfect unity, and this when folk may be quite diverse in their interpretation of much of the Bible. Stone and Campbell even differed on the nature of Christ, but they did not allow this to rupture their fellowship in Christ. Love united them!

These standing orders remind us that there is a judge that presides in our hearts, a judge that arbitrates for us in reference to our sisters and brothers. The judge is Peace, and we will capitalize it since it is a presiding judge. It is the Peace of Christ that judges other believers, accepting or rejecting them. This is why we dare not reject anyone that Christ rejects. The party or sect that we may belong to is not to preside as judge in our hearts, rejecting all those who do not toe the party line or who do not properly mouth all the shibboleths.

God has called us together, not into a sect, but into the one Body. We accept each other on that basis, that together we have been called into one Body. For this we are to be thankful, the apostolic orders go on to say. It is a lovely thing to be laid on us, thankfulness. As you read these words I hope you are thankful that the Lord has called you into His church, that He has given you sisters and brothers to accept and love, and that His peace rules as judge in your hearts.

If we follow these apostolic injunctions we cannot long remain a divided people. Our forebears learned this lesson and thus preserved the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If they plugged into God's power plant and filled their hearts with love and enthroned Peace as the presiding judge within them, why can't we do something about the divisions among us?

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## Chapter 33

# Is Doctrine Important?

*Leroy Garrett*

Now and again a fellow editor refers to those among us who no longer consider doctrine important, that for the sake of unity they are willing to surrender most any doctrinal position they ever held. A recent editorial in *Firm Foundation*, for example, placed restoration over against unity, suggesting that the unitists tend to neglect doctrine while the restorationists stress doctrine to the neglect of unity. While the editor opted for a balance between the two, he clearly implied that the unity advocates put down doctrine as unimportant, especially as it relates to unity and fellowship.

While I personally know no one in the larger circle of Churches of Christ/Christian Churches who holds that the doctrine of Christ is unimportant, whether in reference to unity or not, it may be that some of us have failed to make our position clear, thus calling for these occasional statements from Church of Christ editors.

It would help to clear the air if we could come to one mind on the meaning of *doctrine*. The Greek term *didache* means instruction or teaching, such as in John 7:16: "Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me," and he goes on to say in verse 17: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Acts 2:42 shows that the newly baptized on Pentecost "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." These verses alone would place such significance on doctrine that it would take a careless Christian to say that *didache* is unimportant *in any respect*.

Then there are those instructions of Paul to Timothy: "By laying these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, being fed with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have followed (1 Tim. 4:6), and in verse 13 he tells him: "Until I come, pay attention to reading, to comforting and to teaching (doctrine)." This would not only make doctrine important but *vital* important.

But these editors may have something else in mind by *doctrine*, such as this or that party's interpretation (or opinion) of what the scriptures teach, even including conclusions drawn from the *silence* of the scriptures.

The doctrine of the apostles, for example, makes it clear that drunkenness is a sin (Gal. 5:21), but it is only someone's opinion that it is a sin to have a cocktail with a meal or to drink or make wine at a wedding feast (like Jesus did!). Teetotalism is a matter of *doctrine* to some people, and they are inclined to make their opinion a law for everyone else.

That the Spirit has given diverse gifts to all of us is a fact of the apostles' doctrine (1 Pet. 4:10), but whether any of us today is to speak in tongues or have the power to discern spirits is a matter of opinion. Just as it is clearly the teaching of Paul that "when that which is perfect is come that which is in part shall be done away," but it is a matter of opinion as to what "that which is perfect" refers to.

The observance of the Lord's Supper is clearly New Testament doctrine, but the question of time, frequency, whether in a plurality of cups, wine or grape juice, leavened or unleavened bread, and other such questions are subject to varying interpretations. So there is a big difference between a *fact* of scripture (and the Bible basically is made up of facts) and an opinion growing out of that fact. They are not *both* doctrine!

That the early Christians sang and that they were urged to make singing part of their service to God is one of those facts of scripture. But whether we sing solos or congregationally, a cappella or with accompaniment, chants or with tune are questions of personal interpretation where honest and good hearts have always differed.

The millennium (a reign of a thousand years) is another fact of the apostles' doctrine, but what one makes of what the Bible says is a matter of opinion.

Even Paul and Peter differed, with Paul writing things that Peter considered difficult to grasp – and they were both apostles! One church in the New Testament differed with another church, such as the diversity between Jerusalem and Antioch. But the differences were not in reference to the basic facts themselves. Freedom in Christ, for instance, was a fact of apostolic teaching, but they differed on how this applied to food sacrificed to idols or the celebration of certain days. Our differences should, therefore, not be surprising.

So what do these editors mean when they say some among us are indifferent toward doctrine? I am persuaded they cannot point to a single one of us who thinks the actual teaching of Jesus or the apostles is unimportant. What Jesus says or what the apostles *wrote* is not only important but crucial, but what some preacher or editor makes of what was said or written (or perhaps not said or written at all!) may not be worth the time of day. Doctrine as set forth in scripture I buy; someone's opinion about doctrine I do not necessarily buy. Now does that mean I do not consider *doctrine* important?

To a real believer doctrine is not merely important, but it is as the psalmist said, sweeter than honey and more precious than gold and silver. We are to long for the sincere milk of the word as a newborn baby. It is to be our meditation day and night. We are to revel in such glorious teaching as Paul's hymn of love in 1 Cor. 13, the seven Christian graces of 1 Pet. 1, and the beatitudes of our Lord. Some portions of scripture are powerpacked, being inexhaustible sources of encouragement, such as Romans 8 and 12, Eph. 4, and Col. 3. How blessed it is to read: "Truly, He who did not withhold His own Son, but surrendered Him for us all, shall He not also freely give us all things with Him?" There is little reason for any real differences in regard to these great truths, for they are facts about what God is doing for us believers. Even when it comes to the doctrine regarding the work, worship and organization of the church we hardly ever have differences about what the Bible actually says, but on things wherein it is silent.

So let's keep the record straight. The doctrine of Christ is what is actually set forth in scripture, *facts* about what God's selected envoys have said and done. Interpretation (or opinion) is what we make of those facts. Jesus and his apostles said certain things about divorce, for example. If we stick with what is actually *said*, leaving off our footnotes as to what we think is implied, then we have the true doctrine of divorce. If we think interpretation or amplification is needed (which sometimes leads to still another divorce!), let's be fair enough to say that the teaching is now *ours*,

our own opinion, and not necessarily that of Christ and his apostles. And let's be honorable enough to grant that folk are not necessarily rejecting the doctrine of Christ when they reject our interpretation.

## Gospel and Doctrine

Some of us through the years have pointed to the distinction between doctrine and gospel, which among our own folk is at least as old as Thomas and Alexander Campbell. We have noted that it is the gospel (good news) that brings one into the fellowship of Christ, and that once he is in that fellowship he is to be nourished in the doctrine. This distinction, which our editors have for some reason been slow to accept, leads them to suppose that this makes doctrine unimportant. But similar distinctions do not seem to bother them: they realize it is one thing that *inducts* one into the army, and another that *trains* him once he's inducted; one process *naturalizes* one a citizen, another that *cultivates* him as a citizen; a child is *matriculated* in school and then educated. It would be some school that would keep on enrolling the students day after day, and some army that would continue to induct the soldiers instead of proceeding to train them. And it is some church that does not know the difference between the message of induction into Christ (the gospel) and the curriculum prescribed by the great Master once they are enrolled in his school, which is the doctrine of the apostles. Paul apparently understood the distinction or he would never have written: "For if you have ten thousand *teachers* in Christ, yet not many *fathers* – for I fathered you in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15).

Brethren who cannot accept such a distinction are likely to miss what we say about gospel and doctrine as they relate to fellowship and unity: the gospel brings one into fellowship with Christ and all other believers; doctrine enriches, nourishes and deepens that fellowship once he is in the family of God. It follows, therefore, that there might be considerable differences in doctrinal understanding among believers, if for no other reason some are but babes while others are mature. The same matriculation process may enroll first graders along with high schoolers, but there is a vast difference in their grasp of what is to be learned in school.

A drunkard on skid row who accepts the gospel of Christ may have no understanding at all of the apostles' doctrine when he is baptized. But is he not in the fellowship? Is he not united with all others who are in Christ? Then unity and fellowship in Christ and with each other is not necessarily contingent on understanding doctrine but upon acceptance of and obedience to the gospel, right? If this is a "putdown" of doctrine, then the army recruitment officer is putting down the soldier's training manual when he tells a would-be recruit that it is the induction process that makes him a soldier in Uncle Sam's army. And when the recruit is duly inducted, he is as much a soldier in the army as the greatest expert in military science in the Pentagon.

There was a vast difference between Paul's understanding of the teaching of Christ and that jailer he baptized in Philippi. But the jailer was in the fellowship because he believed and obeyed the gospel as much so as Paul was. Put him with others in the Philippian church, such as Lydia whom the apostle baptized, and you will have people who may never attain to the same level of understanding as they pursue a lifetime of study of the doctrine. There will be doctrinal differences, but this in no way has to impinge upon the beauty of being in Jesus together. In one such situation the apostle put it this way, which is part of the doctrine: "One judges one day above another. Another judges every day alike. Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

Is Paul making doctrine unimportant when he says *Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind*? Could this not also apply to tongue-speaking, millennial theories, methods used in singing and evangelism and all other personal opinions? Part of our problem is that we want to impose our opinions on others. But we don't want others to impose theirs on us. If they practice what we oppose they are heretics or maybe "brothers in error," and if they object to what we practice they are hobbyists.

So it is not really a question of whether doctrine is important, which is absurd, for every sincere believer sees doctrine as not only important but precious. It is a question of whether we take our pet set of opinions and interpretations and bind them upon others as law, making them the doctrine of Christ and castigating everyone who does not see things our way.

If there is anything that is in opposition to the doctrine of Christ, it is this kind of attitude and practice, which will do nothing but continue to splinter and subsplinter the Body of Christ and disrupt its fellowship. As per Rom. 14:4: "Who are you, judging another's servant? He stands or falls to his own master. And he shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 22, No. 1; Jan. 1980)*

Chapter 34

# The Weightier Matters

*Leroy Garrett*

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (Matt. 23:23)*

The scribes and Pharisees were the doctors of the law and the official interpreters of the Scriptures. When it came to what the Scriptures meant they were “the Supreme Court.” Jesus recognized this when he referred to them as those who “sit on Moses’ seat.” He even charged his disciples to “practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach but do not practice” (Mt. 23:23).

There was a fatal flaw in the way these “Ph.D.’s of the law” handled the Scriptures: *they did not distinguish between matters of greater and lesser importance.* This caused them to confuse mere details of the law with fundamental principles of the law. They were slow to see that while all truths are equally true all truths are not equally important.

Or to put it another way, they did not want to see what Jesus saw: *that the Scriptures have “weightier matters” as well as matters not so weighty, even if important.* It is a hazard in Biblical interpretation that has plagued God’s people all these centuries – a failure to distinguish between vital truth and less important truth. Since greater and lesser truths are all equally true, there is the tendency to treat them as equally significant. Add to this the Pharisaical tendency to demand more of others than of oneself, which may plague us all, and we have an oppressive religion. There is thus Jesus’ stinging rebuke: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them upon men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Mt. 23:24).

The “burdens” that the Pharisees imposed upon their people were their own interpretations of what it meant to keep the law, such as observing the Sabbath. These are preserved in the Mishnah, and when one reads these regulations today he may be tempted to laugh at such legalistic hairsplitting, but he is to remember that they were serious business to the Jews of Jesus’ time since they spelled out in minute detail how the law was to be observed. Take, for example, some of the rules on what constituted work on the Sabbath day:

A knot could be tied if it could be untied with one hand.

A bucket may be tied to a belt but not to a rope.

One may spit if he spits on a smooth surface but not on a rough surface.

If a woman wore drawers and took aught out therein either in front of her or behind her, she is culpable, since it is likely to move around.

If one man bears a loaf of bread he is culpable, but if two men bear it they are not.

A woman may not go out with a needle that has an eye, or with a ring that bears a seal, or with a cochlea brooch, or with a spice box or a perfume flask.

A cripple may go out with his wooden stump. But if it has a cavity for pads it is susceptible to uncleanness.

On and on it goes. The Mishnah is more than twice the size of the New Testament and it is filled with such minute legalisms as these. The scribes often debated at length on what violated the Sabbath and what did not. May a man write letters of the alphabet on the Sabbath? If he forgets it is the Sabbath and writes as many as two letters he is guilty so long as it makes a lasting mark. May he scratch letters on his skin, such as write in the palm of the hand as students like to do on examination day? Rabbi Eliezer insisted that such would violate the Sabbath while Rabbi Joshua declared that was allowable.

This is what our Lord had to put up with in his dealings with the scribes and Pharisees. To them “the law” was not only what was written in the Scriptures but all the traditions as well. The tithing of mint, dill, and cumin was part of the minutiae of rabbinic tradition. These were spices and were not specifically named in the law as things to be tithed, but the rabbis advised that they be tithed, for it would make one more righteous. And so Jesus is saying that they were sticklers for the law as to tithe even spices and yet they ignored the laws that really matter.

We can better understand Jesus calling them hypocrites when he could see them examining a wooden leg in search for a cavity or a needle to see if it had an eye, while wholly indifferent to their own neglect of mercy and justice. It must have raised his ire to see the Pharisees examine a woman suspected of having something stuffed in her underwear, for if the object slipped from front to back it would be work and a violation of the Sabbath! Or to see them watch where a man expectorated, for if his spittle fell on something porous the absorption would require nature to work and the Sabbath would be violated! And yet they would turn their backs to “the sinners,” however needy they might be. And so he blasted them as hypocrites!

## **A Look At Ourselves**

Before we join our Lord in excoriating the Pharisees we would do well to look at ourselves. We draw lines on each other over whether “the cup” is one or multiple, whether it contains fermented or unfermented liquid, or whether it is served by a woman. We have argued over round and shaped notes, lesson leaves, graded classes, tuning forks, melodeons, organs, societies, kitchens, fellowship halls. We reject “those for whom Christ died” when they divorce, speak in tongues, think a different thought, entertain a new idea, drink wine, associate with “brothers in error,” communicate with Carl Ketcherside or read *Integrity* or *Restoration Review*. Our colleges have fired people for attending a Full Gospel Men’s Fellowship, going to the wrong church, speaking in tongues, assigning the wrong book, and for being “liberal.” Many a teacher has had his class taken from him because he suggested that the Church of Christ is also a denomination, that we are not the only Christians, that instrumental music is not necessarily a sin, or just for being different. I know, for I have talked to scores of them by phone. We are as watchful over our unwritten creeds as the Pharisees ever were of their traditions. Moreover, we are often downright discourteous, rude, and

unfair toward those “in error,” and these are sometimes missionaries who dare to cross party lines and are forthwith abandoned on a foreign field with no support. Often our ethics is that “heretics” and “liberals” have no rights. How merciful, loving, and just are we in all these things? Are we too hypocrites?

We have here another principle of hermeneutics: We are to interpret the Bible in terms of the weightier matters and the greater truths. And it is the Lord himself who lays down the rule. If he would speak of weightier matters it is evident that there are lighter matters.

At least twice in Scripture we find Jesus referring to this rule. When the Pharisees questioned his eating with sinners and tax collectors, he invited them to make a study of Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” Jesus urged them to go and find out what the prophet meant (Mt. 9:13). It was an appeal to the weightier matters. When the Pharisees questioned him for allowing his disciples to pluck ears of grain on the Sabbath he again appealed to Hosea’s great line, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Mt. 12:7). This time he says to them, “If you had known what this means you would not have condemned the guiltless.”

If you had known what this means gets to the heart of Biblical interpretation. We may know the letter of the Bible without knowing its spirit. Jesus is really pointing us to what the Bible is all about, the weightier matters of peace, mercy, grace, justice, and as Micah 6:8 adds, “walking humbly before God.”

Another way of stating this principle is that the Bible, as well as all of life, must be seen in true perspective. An alarming characteristic of the human mind is that it can lose all sense of proportion. A person can see things of no importance alongside things of eternal importance, even in his own life, and make no distinction between them. William Barclay tells of the Scotsman who wrote in his diary on a given day that his wife had given birth to a son and he had received a green swallow from Jamaica. With an astonishing lack of perspective he placed the birth of a man child into the world, even his own son, and the arrival of a green swallow side by side.

We do this when we make the time and frequency of the Lord’s Supper as important as the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. It is a lack of perspective that causes us to consider the how of singing hymns, doing missions, or caring for the needy as much as the acts themselves. We sometimes get so lopsided that we will not do good things, and will even hinder others doing them, if the how is not our way. Jesus being the judge, it is safe to conclude that it is better to err on the side of being too merciful or too yielding than to be too exact and too demanding.

I am reminded of the preacher who insisted that the use of instrumental music is as serious a sin as adultery. I could not believe he really believed that. His approach to the Bible forced him to such a conclusion.

Paul had a sense of proportion when on the one hand he gladly circumcised Timothy but on the other hand adamantly refused to circumcise Titus. Difference in circumstance affect the way a matter is decided. The “necessary things” that the apostles imposed upon the Gentile churches in Acts 15 were crucial to their circumstance, but they have little importance to us. A man might fight in one war but be a protester in the next. This sense of perspective, which is balanced thinking, is to guide our study of the Bible. We will then no longer argue over unimportant details or over issues

that do not matter. Many lives have been made miserable and many churches have been torn asunder over trifles.

The right perspective is ours – the proper balance – when we have our eye fixed upon the Cross and upon God’s grace. When all things in life are measured in the light of the eternal verities, then life will be whole and eternity secure. This is what our Lord meant when he spoke of “If thine eye be single (sound), thy whole body shall be full of light” (Mt. 6:22). He had just said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If our treasure is heavenly things, “the weightier matters,” then the eye is sound and life will be rightly proportioned.

Another way to say all this is that religion can be bogus as well as real, false as well as true. False or bogus religion can have its proof texts right out of the Bible. The Pharisees were testimony that religion can be bad and yet “scriptural.” Jesus said they searched the Scriptures, but they missed the weightier matters.

I am persuaded that the one essential ingredient of true religion is humility before God. A religion that makes people arrogant and self-righteous cannot be true religion. The one thing that God requires along with justice and mercy is to walk humbly before God. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,” Prov. 3:5 urges us, “and lean not upon thine own understanding.” That says it all, and such humility comes only as we surrender our pride at the foot of the Cross and glory in the grace of God, and pray the sinner’s prayer, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

That prayer, which so impressed our Lord, is surely one of the weightier truths of the Bible. Grace and mercy along with humility and prayer is what true religion is all about.

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Chapter 35

# Must We Give Up Our Opinions For the Sake of Unity?

*Leroy Garrett*

*Men cannot give up their opinions, and, therefore, they never can unite, says one. We do not ask them to give up their opinions. We ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions; but let them hold them as private property. (Alexander Campbell, Millennial Harbinger, 1830, p. 145).*

Here we have the essence of “the Plea” as urged upon the church of the 19th century by Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. Believers can unit upon the general truths of the Christian faith and allow opinions as a matter of liberty. Their plea gave rise to an old motto: *In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love.* The motto was also expressed as “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” That is one way of saying that an opinion is nonessential even if deemed important.

Campbell particularly objected to the practice of excommunicating one or withdrawing fellowship from one because of a wrong opinion or for simply being mistaken. As he put it, “It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect,” and “I never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.”

To Campbell this is what made sects, *making opinions a test of fellowship.* And this is why his reformation efforts could not be accused of being sectarian. He issued this challenge: “I will now show you how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ.” This is clearly a broader view of fellowship than is held by many who profess to be a part of the Movement launched by Alexander Campbell.

Such a liberal view invites the question of how far one will go in accepting other believers. We often hear “He will fellowship anybody and everybody,” which, if true, is an understandable complaint since Christian fellowship certainly has its limits. When Campbell was asked if he would fellowship a Unitarian, he responded: “What is a Unitarian? One who contends that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God. Such a one has denied the faith, and therefore we reject him.” And yet Campbell conceded that he would accept even a Unitarian if he will ascribe to Jesus all that the Bible ascribes to him.

So with a Trinitarian, Campbell went on to say, “If he will dogmatize and become a factionist, we reject him – not because of his opinions, but because of his attempting to make a faction, or to lord it over God’s heritage.”

Universalism was a controversial issue in those days, and Campbell explained that his people would even accept a Universalist, on one important condition:

And will you receive a Universalist too? No; not as a Universalist. If a man, professing Universalist opinions, should apply for admission, we will receive him, if he will consent to use and apply all the Bible phrases in their plain reference to the future state of men and angels. We will not hearken to those questions which gender strife, nor discuss them at all. If a person says such is his private opinion, let him have it as his private opinion; but lay no stress upon it; and if it be a wrong private opinion, it will die a natural death much sooner than if you attempt to kill it. (*Mill. Harb.*, 1830, p. 147)

In the same essay Campbell refers to the case of Aylette Raines, who became a preacher in the Movement while he still held Universalist opinions. When some of the leaders wanted to excommunicate Raines for said opinions, both Thomas and Alexander Campbell stood up for him, contending that he should not be rejected for an opinion per se. This is how Campbell described it some years later:

Some of us made a proposition that if these peculiar opinions were held as *private* opinions, and not taught by this brother, he might be, and, constitutionally, ought to be retained; but if he should teach or inculcate such private opinions, or seek to make disciples to them, he would then become a factionist, and as such could not be fellowshipped.

Campbell's prediction that an opinion left alone would die on its own proved true in Raines' case. Years later Raines, after decades of preaching on the frontier, acknowledged to Campbell that he hardly recalled what his opinions were in those earlier years, and he thanked him and his father for saving his ministry at a time when it might have been destroyed. And how often have we destroyed men for their opinions when it was so unnecessary!

One will notice that Campbell here makes a clear-cut distinction between heresy and an error and between a factionist and one with a mistaken view. One who holds a doctrinal error is not a factionist, but one who is pushy and seeks to gain disciples for his view. Heresy is not simply being honestly mistaken on a matter of doctrine, but the evil effort to create division within the Body of Christ. This means that Campbell would never brand something like premillennialism a heresy, though he would insist that a premillennialist (or one with any other millennial view) is not to try to build a party. If he does, he is a factionist, whether right or wrong in doctrine. Heresy is therefore a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal problem.

The principle of "In opinions, liberty" allows for the diversity that is certain to be present in any free society. People can no more see every point eye-to-eye than they can warp and twist every muscle and sinew so as to look alike. If men are left free, it is certain that they will differ, which is as it should be since we grow in an environment of vigorous differences. And so unity by its very nature is oneness amidst diversity. A family is a good example of how this works, for its members can be of one heart and one soul despite differences in age, experience, sex, ability, and hang-ups. Unity always has a cohesiveness that holds the diverse elements together. Some suppose that even among thieves, when they are united, there is honor. Whether in the home or the church, the cohesiveness is love and mutual respect. Paul names it in Col. 3:14: "Above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

That love is the bond that holds together that which would otherwise be divided is evident from what the apostle said in earlier verses of the chapter. "Bearing with one another," he says in verse

13, “and forgiving one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” That little *as* is powerful in that it reveals that we are to show the forbearance and love to each other that Jesus showed us. Such instruction implies that there will be differences. If we must agree on everything and be carbon copies of each other, there is nothing to forbear.

One problem with all this is that we cannot seem to agree on what is a matter of faith and what is a matter of opinion. And some make the practice of a Sunday School or the use of instrumental music a matter of faith, while to others these are matters of opinion. It may help if we distinguish between faith (a scruple) and the faith, which is the gospel itself. The Scriptures make this distinction, such as in Rom. 14:22: “Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.” Here faith is referred to as an opinion or scruple, such as regarding dietary practices or observing of holy days. This is not the same faith that refers to the basics of the Christian religion, such as Gal. 3:25: “But after (the) faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor,” and Jude 3: “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” This distinction is a difference between essentials and nonessentials. This is who Paul would tell one with a scruple about meats, “Have your faith (opinion) to yourself before God,” for while he must follow his conscience and abide by his “faith,” it is not something essential (the faith) that is to be imposed on those who have no such scruple.

Or we can distinguish between faith and opinion this way: *faith is limited to what the Scriptures actually say, while opinion is what one supposes it means by what it says.* We can all agree, for instance, that Jesus said, “Thy kingdom come,” but we may have different opinions as to what he meant by this. Or we can say that faith is based upon facts, particularly the facts of the gospel, while opinion is a theory about what said facts might imply, or a theology drawn from them. Faith is based on testimony, while an opinion is a deduction drawn from that testimony. We can all agree that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (testimony), but we may differ as to what theological systems, called Christology, can be erected upon that testimony. The facts about Christ are essential, the theories about him are not.

This is why theories about the millennium or speaking in tongues or the inspiration of Scripture, or such methods as missionary societies or instrumental music are only matters of opinion and not matters of faith. Where the Bible does not speak plainly there can be no faith. And so “In opinions, liberty” means that amillennial and premillennial churches can be united to the glory of God despite their diverse views. So with charismatic and noncharismatic, instrumental and a cappella. We can all have our opinions and preferences so long as we do not impose them upon others as matters of faith. This is the only way unity will ever be possible.

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Chapter 36

## What Difference Do Differences Make?

*Leroy Garrett*

An article in *Guardian of Truth*, a Church of Christ paper, authored by Steve Wolfgang, on the history of the institutional controversy caught my eye, mainly because it raised the question as to whether the 25yearold controversy could have been avoided. The “institutional controversy” concerns such matters as the support of the Herald of Truth TV/Radio program, colleges, and orphan homes. Journals, colleges, churches, and preachers have taken different sides. Numerous debates have been held through the years. Some of those involved in the dispute contend that another division has already taken place, adding still another kind of Church of Christ to a list that is already far too long. That is the case in my own hometown where we have what one side calls an “anti” Church of Christ and the other side calls the “institutional” Churches of Christ. There is no fellowship between them.

I do not recognize such drawing of lines against sisters and brothers in Christ, and I do not believe in such sectarianism. I have no “anti” brethren or “institutional” brethren. They are all my brethren in Christ equally, and I love and accept them all. I may not agree with either side, but that has nothing to do with the fact that we have all been baptized into Christ and are part of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are in fellowship with each other whether we like it or not, and we should like it since it was God who called us into the fellowship, not some party. We will have to give an account to him as to the way we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But I was interested in what the writer would say about whether the fratricidal altercation could have been avoided. His answer was that it could not. Was the division preventable? No, he says. Was it inevitable? Yes. Is there any possibility of the restoration of fellowship? He says no, though he wishes it were otherwise.

What impresses me about the article is the underlying assumption that the differences have to be resolved before there can be fellowship. The writer says, for example, that the division could not be avoided because the differences could not be resolved. He quotes historian David Harrell, who is on his side of the controversy, as saying: “Does anyone seriously believe that the thousands of unscriptural promotions dreamed up will suddenly, or slowly, begin to disappear? Of course not. No man could bring it off; not 20 or 50 or 200 men could bring it off. And not only *could* they not, they *will* not bring it about.”

It is clear that these brethren believe that fellowship is contingent on seeing eye-to-eye on “the issues.” Each of our sects has its own set of “issues” that it makes tests of fellowship. Harrell is saying that the institutional brethren are not going to give up their institutions, so there can be no fellowship with them. Others in the Church of Christ would say the same thing about Harrell: They refuse to have fellowship with him because he won’t give up his “unscriptural promotions,” such as multiple cups for Communion and the Sunday School.

This mentality that we must agree on all these things before we can be in fellowship is a fallacy that has been our undoing. It is the reason why our people, who began as a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects, have divided and subdivided into twenty-odd fragments in this century alone. It is contrary to the genius of our Movement, which was based upon the premise of “In essentials, unity; in opinions (and methods), liberty; in all things, love,” and had as one of its epigrams “We are free to differ, but not to divide.”

### **Free To Differ or Free To Divide?**

Those of a different spirit insist on the converse of that: We are not free to differ, but we are free to divide.

Their position is also at odds with the very Book they look to as authoritative.

As far back as Abraham there was the principle that men can see things differently and still accept each other as brothers. Abraham and Lot had a dispute. The patriarch pled with his nephew on the grounds that “We are kinsmen” or “We are brethren,” and so “Let there be no dispute between you and me” (Gen. 13:8). Abraham’s conciliatory spirit was based upon what has always been considered common sense neighborliness: People can disagree without falling out.

That spirit had difficulty surviving among God’s people. Even the apostle John was afflicted with narrow exclusiveness, according to Mark 9:38. He found one casting out demons in the name of Christ and forbade him, for “he was not following us.” He reported this to Jesus, as a good party man would, expecting the Lord to support him. The Lord did not go along, which must have surprised John as much as it does many sectarians today, who have a way of ignoring this passage. Jesus told John not to forbid him, for if one is not against him he is for him. Here Jesus makes it clear that his followers can have differences and still accept each other. And the differences can be substantial enough that they do not follow each other – “He follows not us,” John complained.

This principle became an apostolic mandate as a means of preserving unity amidst diversity: “As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions” (Rom. 14:1). This tells us plainly that we are to receive each other despite differences. This was generally the practice of the early Christians. The congregations were not carbon copies of each other. Even Paul and Peter had their differences *within* the fellowship.

So, the answer to our question as to what difference differences make we have to conclude that they do not have to disrupt fellowship *so long as they are matters of opinion, methods, and personal or congregational preference*. There were some problems in the early church that were far more serious and they threatened the survival of the church itself. Tradition has it that the apostle John fled the bathhouse when the heretic Cerenthus entered. This was a far different case than the one of the man who was serving Christ but not following with John, for Cerenthus was a Gnostic who preached a different gospel.

This is to say that there are differences that matter enough that they render fellowship impossible. If they deny or compromise the essentials of the faith, they cannot be tolerated. This is why in Scripture a heretic is to be rejected (Tit. 3:10), false teachers are identified (2 Pet. 2:13), deceivers of the simple are marked (Rom. 16:17-18), and the antichrists are not to be received (2 John 7:10).

But these are not the kinds of differences that Wolfgang and Harrell are talking about. A brother who believes he may support gospel preaching by sending his money to a sponsoring church instead of through the church treasury (Neither is in the Bible!) may be honestly mistaken, but he is not an antichrist or heretic. Supporting an orphanage is not a denial of the person of Christ. These are matters of opinion, honest differences, and they are not destructive to the soul, unless perchance one is lead to go against his own conscience.

So, there are differences that can be absorbed within a loving and accepting fellowship. We have churches that support Herald of Truth and orphanages and those that do not. We can have churches that use instrumental music or have a Sunday School and those that do not. And on and on this can go, with each Christian and each congregation following his or its own preference and conscience.

But we cannot have churches that are antichrist or deny the gospel or are heretical and churches that are not. Here the line has to be drawn, for light cannot fellowship darkness, Christ cannot fellowship Belial.

But it is an entirely different matter when brethren differ over incidentals, methods, opinions, scruples, and honest efforts to understand and follow the Bible.

If we leave the matter where brethren Wolfgang and Harrell have it, unity is an impossibility, for we are never going to see all these things alike, So long as we say "You have to see it my way for me to accept you," we will continue in our sectarian ways, dividing and subdividing. But if we will allow love and forbearance to transcend petty differences, we can "Preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Do we really desire to follow the plain injunctions of Scripture in this regard?

The choice is ours. We can be sectarian or we can be free in Christ. We can be petty and shallow or we can be magnanimous and reasonable. We can responsibly make distinctions between differences, recognizing that while some are crucial others are less important, or we can irresponsibly preserve the old bromides of our insipid sectarianism.

Sweet reasonableness! That is what we see in Jesus and in Scripture, and that is the great need of the hour.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 31, No. 7; Sept. 1989)*

Chapter 37

# The “One Baptism” and Fellowship

*Leroy Garrett*

*(This was originally a letter to Arnold Hardin of Dallas, Texas, editor of The Persuader.)*

I agree with you – and with Paul and with Alexander Campbell – that the seven ones of Eph. 4, which Campbell liked to call “the seven facts,” are the basis for unity. They are indeed *facts* or propositions and form the essence of the gospel, for they point to what God has done for us through Christ. They are not seven opinions, though there are countless opinions as to what they may mean or imply. So, while I believe that the seven facts are necessary to unity, I cannot believe that anyone’s *opinion* about them is essential to unity. There are many opinions, for example, about “the one Spirit” – how he functions, his gifts, glossolalia, etc. – and while these may be held as opinion they cannot be made a test of fellowship. But anyone who repudiates the “one Spirit” as a fact or a reality could not be a true believer.

While I believe the seven unities of Eph. 4 to be essential to unity and fellowship, I do not believe that a perfect understanding or compliance to them is essential. If perfection is required, we are all doomed, for who has made a perfect response to the “one hope” or to the “one Lord.” It appears that some early Christians, such as in Corinth, were still affected by idolatry, even though they accepted the fact of the “one God and Father of us all.” It is a matter of one’s heart and mind being turned in the right direction, and not a matter of perfect knowledge or perfect response.

Most of my brethren in Churches of Christ would agree with me that on six of these facts there might be some imperfection in knowledge and obedience. Even though we are strongly church oriented, few would say that we have to know everything about the “one body” to be true Christians, or even the “one faith,” however much we have taught about it. So with the one God, one Spirit, one Lord, and one hope.

The hang-up is on the “one baptism,” for here we demand perfection across the board, whether it be the mode, design, or meaning of baptism. While all believers accept what Eph. 4:5 actually says, that there is “one baptism,” we insist that they accept our interpretation of its meaning and obey the ordinance as we understand it, before we acknowledge them as Christians. Many among us even insist that one must understand why he is baptized, and they dictate the *why* – one must understand he is baptized for the remission of sins.

Nearly all believers would grant that no one is a true Christian who repudiates any ordinance of God, including baptism. Anyone who rejects baptism rejects the counsel of God (Lk. 7:30) and falls short of the basis of unity as prescribed in Eph. 4.

But suppose one has both accepted and obeyed the ordinance of baptism “in his heart,” as Campbell put it, “while mistaking the form” (assuming immersion to be the correct form or mode)? Is he in the same category as one who has repudiated the ordinance? Is he not a Christian for lack of water, being only sprinkled rather than immersed?

## Campbell's View

We should be able to see why Alexander Campbell wrote as he did on this matter:

“I cannot, therefore, make any one duty the standard of Christian state or character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their knowledge and consent, as aliens from Christ and the well grounded hope of heaven.”

Campbell anticipated the question that is often asked, “How do you know that one loves Christ except by his obedience to his commandments?” His answer was:

“In no other way. But mark, I do not substitute obedience to one commandment, for universal or even for general obedience. And should I see a sectarian Baptist or a Pedobaptist more spiritually - minded, more generally conformed to the requisitions of the Messiah, than one who precisely acquiesces with me in the theory or practice of immersion as I teach, doubtless the former rather than the latter, would have my cordial approbation and love as a Christian. So I judge and so I feel. It is the image of Christ the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known.”

And Campbell drew the same distinction that I did above, between mistakes of the mind and mistakes of the heart: “With me mistakes of the understanding and errors of the affection are not to be confounded. They are as distant as the poles. An angel may mistake the meaning of a commandment, but he will obey it in the sense in which he understands it.”

He goes on to say what is badly needed in the thinking of Church of Christ folk: “Many a good man has been mistaken. Mistakes are to be regarded as culpable and as declarative of a corrupt heart only when they proceed from a willful neglect of the means of knowing what is commanded. Ignorance is always a crime when it is voluntary; and innocent when it is involuntary.”

In the same essay, which is found in *Millennial Harbinger* (1837), p. 411, he answers the question *Who is a Christian?*

“I answer, Every one that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will.” These reflections from Alexander Campbell are especially significant since he championed the cause of baptism by immersion and for the remission of sins as much as any theologian in modern times.

Campbell or not, we must not impose upon the “one baptism” of Eph. 4 what is not there. If we make it mean “one immersion,” we do so only by ignoring the context. The apostle is affirming oneness for Jewish and Gentile believers. Jews and Gentiles are in the one body and worship the one God and share the one faith and the one hope. They look to the one Lord and are infused by the same Spirit. In this context it would mean little to speak of one *immersion* – as if there could be more than one!

This is why we err when we make baptism *mean* immersion. It means no such thing, even if it was by immersion. The Greek word etymologically means *to dip* or to *immerse*, but words are not to be judged simply by etymology. If so, we would have to revise our dictionary, for words are not defined by their origin as much as by their use. The word candidate, for example, means “one who comes out dressed in white” if you go to etymology, but we know it does not mean that. The word dean means “a leader of ten men” etymologically, but its real meaning is different.

We believe we can establish that baptism was practiced by immersion by the early church, but that does not make baptism *mean* immersion. If we sought a word that best expressed its meaning, it might be *initiation*. This gives meaning to the “one baptism” of Eph. 4. The apostle is saying that everyone is initiated into the community of Christ alike – one initiation for Jews and Gentiles. This gives meaning to similar passages, such as Luke 7:30 where the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God’s counsel by rejecting John’s baptism. It is not that they rejected immersion, but they rejected the initiatory ceremony that would have inducted them into the community John was preparing for the coming of Christ. The Great Commission is similar: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.” While the act of baptism was by dipping in water, its meaning was something like initiation or enrollment, as the term “make disciples” would suggest. There was a rite whereby they were to be enrolled in the school of Christ. In this instance we might say that baptism means enrollment.

I say this in order to observe that John the Baptist or Jesus and his disciples did not *choose* immersion or dipping in water as the rite of initiation into the new community. Jesus did not invent or originate immersion as a ceremony. Neither did John the Baptist. When the Pharisees observed John baptizing, they knew exactly what he was doing. It was a familiar rite, long practiced by the Jews. What upset the Pharisees was that John was relating this old rite of initiation to a coming Christ and a coming kingdom of God, thus calling for their repentance.

While Paul later found great symbolic value in immersion, as in Romans 6, we are not to presume that the founders of the church selected it for this reason, for they did not select it at all. They used the rite that was familiar, but elevated it to greater significance. It could be argued that the practice of immersion (washings) among the Jews was part of the preparation that the God of heaven made for the coming of the Messiah and his community, and so he had baptism there as a recognized rite of initiation when John came on the scene. But it could also be argued that it did not matter all that much, that John sought for an initiatory symbol of some sort, something for the people to do as a “stepping out” act of decision, so he simply used what was already known and practiced, giving it special meaning. He *might* have used something else, such as anointing the eyes with clay and spittle, followed by washing the eyes, a rite Jesus used at least once.

But my point is that the *meaning* of John’s baptism (and of Christian baptism that followed) was not that it was immersion but that it was an act of initiation into a new community. Immersion was but its mode.

### **“One Immersion”**

If you ask the *So what?* of all this, it is that we may miss the point of baptism when we are preoccupied with its mode, and especially when we labor to make baptism mean immersion. It is risky to equate baptism with immersion, as if they were synonymous. Of the hundreds of

translations of the New Testament hardly any dares to substitute immersion for baptism, not even those translations made by those who practice immersion. Our own Alexander Campbell is an exception in that in his *Living Oracles* immerse and immersion displace baptize and baptism, the wisdom of which can be and has been seriously questioned.

To impose immersion upon some passages, as if it were the *meaning* of the original Greek word, is to make them awkward to say the least, Eph. 4:5 being one of them: to say “one Lord, one faith, one immersion” is not the same as saying “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” One points to the mode of the rite; the other points to the rite itself. Despite our complaints to the contrary, it is probably just as well that the Greek word has through the years been consistently *baptize* and *baptism*. Perhaps that too has been the providence of God.

Another part of the *So what?* is that other modes of baptism are rendered less offensive. After all, we level a serious indictment against most of the Christian world when we make baptism mean immersion, which implies a degeneracy on the part of those who do not see and practice baptism the way we do. If it is as “simple” and “clear” as we claim, why does such an infinitesimal part of the Christian world insist on immersion? Many who practice other modes readily admit that immersion was the primitive mode, but they believe the sprinkling of water captures the meaning of the initiatory rite as well as immersion, and that they are in no wise rejecting the ordinance of baptism. Are we to dechristianize them for this?

We should at least be able to see that those who have been “sprinkled” or “poured” have submitted to an initiatory act. It is not as if they have rejected baptism or not been baptized at all. They have “stepped out” and declared themselves as part of the Christian community by being baptized, even if it was not by the mode used by John and the primitive church.

How important is this “mistake” (as most of you and I see it) to the God of heaven? Is the difference in the amount of water between sprinkling and immersion of great import to Jesus Christ? I do not know. Speaking for myself, I was immersed and this is what I believe. It is also what I must practice. It would have to be a very unusual circumstance for me to sprinkle someone, but I suppose I would do so if immersion were impossible. This is almost certainly how other modes started, as a sincere effort to obey an ordinance of God in dire circumstances, not as a repudiation of immersion or even as an indifference to immersion. We as immersionists must rid ourselves of the ungracious notion that those who do not baptize the way we do have rebellious and disobedient hearts. They can be mistaken without being degenerate. And they can be mistaken and still be Christians who are pleasing God, just as we can still be Christians when we are mistaken.

Our position on immersion would be much stronger if we could prove that (1) baptism *means* immersion; (2) baptism by immersion was chosen (originated) by John and Jesus rather than borrowed from current practice; (3) that any other mode is absolutely and incontrovertibly unacceptable and invalid to the Lord Jesus Christ and the God of heaven. I cannot prove any of these things, so while I remain an immersionist I nonetheless accept as Christians those who practice other modes.

Since some of my readers may be of the persuasion of some of those to whom Alexander Campbell was writing in the quotations given above, I will close with one more statement of his from the same essay:

“My correspondent may belong to a class who think that we detract from the authority and value of an institution the moment we admit the bare possibility of any one being saved without it.”

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 25, No. 8; Oct. 1984)*

Chapter 38

## Are We to Fellowship the Unimmersed?

*Leroy Garrett*

*My opinion is that immersion is the only baptism. But shall I therefore make my opinion a term of Christian fellowship? If in this case I thus act, where shall I cease from making my opinions terms of fellowship? I confess I see no end. Barton W. Stone, Christian Messenger, 1831, p. 19.*

You may agree that opinions should not be made tests of fellowship and yet insist that immersion is not an opinion but a matter of fact. Barton Stone anticipated you when he made the above statement, for he added: "You may say that immersion is so plainly the meaning of Christian baptism, you know not how any honest man can be ignorant of it. This is the very language of all opinionists."

He goes on to refer to the doctrine of the trinity as an opinion, though trinitarians insist that it is a fact of Scripture. Then he says, "So speak all Sectarians respecting their opinions."

It is impressive that while Stone was an avowed immersionist, noting on one occasion that there was not one in 500 among his churches that was not immersed, he nonetheless admitted that it was an opinion and should not therefore be made a test of fellowship.

What is an opinion? While Stone does not say it in so many words, he seems to understand an opinion to be a viewpoint held on a matter that honest, intelligent people may see differently. That is close to what Webster says, "a belief not based on absolute certainty or positive knowledge but on what seems true, valid, or probable to one's own mind." Is not the mode of baptism of this character? We might see the evidence for baptism by immersion only as overwhelmingly convincing (to us at least, as it was to Stone), and yet concede that it is not absolutely certain. If it is not "positive knowledge" it is an opinion. Even if we insist that immersion only is "next to certain" it is still an opinion.

One might ask that if immersion only is not an absolute fact what would be? There are many incontrovertible facts in Scripture. Baptism is one, for it is universally agreed that baptism was a practice of the early church. It is the exact mode and design that are questioned. Christ himself is an absolute fact of Scripture, but the nature of Christ is a matter of opinion. A fact is what is actually said or done. An opinion is what the fact or the thing done is made to mean. Jesus' words, "My Father is greater than I," is a statement of fact, and we can all agree that he said that. But we do not agree on what he meant by it. Fact and opinion.

If we insist that baptism by immersion only is a matter of absolute fact, we have the problem of explaining why most Christians through the centuries, who are as honest and intelligent as ourselves, have not seen it as we have. An interesting book on the history of the dispute about baptism, entitled *The Water That Divides*, shows that the issue is not as simple as we have supposed. He notes that while there is universal agreement that baptism was often by immersion in the New Testament, it is not universally agreed that *all* baptisms were by immersion. And so

throughout the history of the church, the author states, baptism has been administered by immersion, pouring, and sprinkling.

How are we as immersionists to react to the fact that most professed Christians have not been baptized by immersion? Do we accept them into our fellowship or reject them? If we reject them, we are implying by our action that the vast majority of the Christians in the world are not really Christians. If we accept them, we may suppose we are being untrue to what we understand the Bible to teach.

It is noteworthy that the founding pioneer of the Restoration Movement, if we name only one man, and one who adamantly defended and practiced baptism by immersion, would not go so far as to refuse fellowship to the unimmersed. He did not believe there was any violation of Scripture in them. In fact these words from the same essay that contains the above quotation indicates that he believed he would violate the spirit of Scripture if he did not accept them:

But says one, I cannot have communion with an unimmersed person because he is not a member of the church of Christ, however pious and holy he may be. I ask, is he a heathen, or publican? for such is the character of those excluded from the church, Mt.18. All are either for or against Christ the Lord. "He that is not with me is against me." Shall we say, all are enemies of Christ who are not immersed? We dare not. If they are not enemies, or if they are not against him they are for him and with him; shall we reject those who are with Jesus, from us? Shall we refuse communion with those with whom the Lord communes?

Stone asks some hard questions in this appeal for a broader fellowship. "Shall we make immersion the test of religion?" he asks, "and shall we center all religion on this one point?" He asks why immersion is emphasized more than the love of God, holiness, mercy, and self denial. He argues that if God could accept Cornelius before he was immersed, we should be able to accept those who have not yet attained to our understanding. He urges that we show caution in rejecting those that God accepts.

If you say it is a question of accepting those who are truly our brothers and sisters in Christ, Stone would agree, and he gives a definition to that end: "Let us acknowledge all to be our brethren who believe in the Lord Jesus, and humbly and honestly obey him as far as they know his will and their duty."

It is in that definition that I believe we have our answer as to whom we should accept: *All those who are following Christ the best they know how.* In doing so we are approving of no error they may mistakenly hold. We are compromising no truth that we hold. In an atmosphere of loving acceptance we can teach with "longsuffering and doctrine" what we believe about baptism by immersion. We will likely immerse more people this way than by leaving the impression that we think baptism is the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith. This was the case with Stone and his churches, for while he had this liberal view toward the unimmersed he could nonetheless report that virtually everyone was immersed sooner or later, "not one in 500 is not immersed," as he put it.

Stone's more open view of fellowship is easier to see when we have a less institutional, organizational concept of the church. When we think in terms of becoming part of an organization or adding names to an official membership list, we are likely to think in more exacting and legalistic terms. But when we work alongside a nun in a city slum clothing the naked, with a Red Cross worker in rescuing victims in an earthquake zone, or with one from the Salvation Army in a soup

kitchen, we are likely to have a different view of fellowship, especially when we see a commitment to Christ on their part greater than our own.

If we can work with a nun in a slum to the glory of God, we should be able to enjoy fellowship with her in the assembly of the saints, not because she is a nun but because she loves and serves Jesus just as we do. Perhaps we cannot accept her in “our church” or in “our party” but certainly in a gathering of the Body of Christ! Jesus said, “If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26). Let us be followers of God as beloved children.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 31, No. 3; March 1989)*

Chapter 39

## Our Fathers on “Who is a Christian?”

*Leroy Garrett*

In recent years I have come to view that question *Who is a Christian?* as somewhat loaded, for as often as not it is calculated to force one into a corner and to demand of him a list of particulars. One hardly ever asks *Who is a disciple?*, and perhaps it is a better question. It is also more Biblical, for *Christian* only appears three times and is never defined. Whereas *disciple* appears often and is defined by Jesus when he says: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another” (John 13:35), and even identifies the disciple *indeed*: “If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed” (Jn. 8:31).

Did anyone ever ask you who is a Christian *indeed*?

I never recall being asked *Who is a disciple?* Everyone seems to know that a disciple is a learner or follower. It is simple and uncomplicated, while *Christian* is made more technical, and (in our circles at least) more exact. We have those among us who would grant that one may be a disciple who is not a Christian. This is where it gets sticky, and it says something about us when we hesitate to be specific about when one is a disciple but most punctiliar as to when he is a Christian.

You may be aware that Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone disagreed on the name that should grace the Movement they began. Stone was certain that Acts 11:26 (“the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch”) reveals a God given name, while Campbell was equally convinced that it was a nickname. The Bethany sage noted that it was strange that Luke the historian never himself used that name in identifying the disciples, if indeed it was God given. And he reminded Stone that a believer never in the New Testament calls himself a Christian, nor does a believer ever in the New Testament call another believer a Christian. Disciples, of course, along with other appellations, are all over the place. The two founding fathers resolved the issue by using both names (if not three) and were known by the community by both names, Disciples of Christ and Christian Church (or Church of Christ).

We in Churches of Christ make little use of *disciple*, strongly preferring *Christian*, though, strangely enough not Christian Church. Perhaps *disciple* is too generic, too broad. Yet one wonders why, in the light of Scripture, we could not all unite on being *disciples of Christ*, with or without the capital D. *Disciple* is defined in Scripture; *Christian* is not. If you accept one as a disciple of Jesus Christ, then you should be able to work and worship with him. If not, why not?

I am tempted to respond to the oft asked question as to who is a Christian by noting that it is hardly a Biblical question, for there is not sufficient data to come up with a solid answer. A king told an apostle that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian, but that apostle in responding seemed to have deliberately avoided using the term (Acts 26:28-29). One is left to wonder if Paul ever applied the term to himself – or to any other believer for that matter. But another apostle, while he never calls believers by that name, nonetheless insisted that they should glorify God in that name (1 Pet. 4:16). There is no question, however, as to who a disciple is, for there are several clearcut answers,

John 15:8 being still another: “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples.”

But even if there is ambiguity in regard to this name, I agree with Barton Stone when he complained to Campbell, *Who can possibly object to the name Christian?* Campbell did not object to it, but only thought *disciple* to be more appropriate and Biblical. We should all be willing to go along with Peter, whether the name originated in the mouths of our enemies or not, and glorify God in this name. But those who are tempted to give an ironclad, arbitrary definition of the term are to be reminded that any definition at all is one’s own deduction and therefore only an opinion. I personally deduce that *Christian* must mean the same as *disciple*, nothing more nor less. This is why I cannot say that one must be immersed to be a Christian, for I do not believe that one has to be immersed to be a disciple. A true disciple obeys Jesus *insofar as he understands*. I would say the same for a true Christian, but I have lots of brethren who disagree with me. They would agree that a disciple might be unimmersed, but not a Christian! That is why I say if we could avoid anything like a *technical* definition of the name and think more in terms of the meaning of discipleship, it might help. And it just might be more Biblical!

### Defining Christian

In referring to the controversy between Stone and Campbell, I should add that they both came up with a definition of a Christian. It may prove enlightening to take a look, for their deductions not only grew out of long years of study but amidst conflict as well.

“Whoever acknowledges the leading truths of Christianity, and conforms his life to that acknowledgment, we esteem a Christian,” wrote Stone in his *Biography* (p. 332). He insisted that there is a necessary connection between faith and practice. One is not only to believe the great truths of the Christian faith, but he is to conform his life to them.

In the same paragraph Stone sees those who would impose their opinions upon others as essentials as mischief makers: “They present us with their explanation of scripture doctrine, their dogmas, and gravely tell us, ‘here are the essentials of religion, to which you must subscribe, or be damned!’”

It is noteworthy that he says this along with his definition of a Christian, as if he too had been beset by definitions too severe. He goes on to say this: “We must carefully distinguish between believing fundamental scripture truths, and any explanation of them by fallible men.” Two pages over he stresses it further: *We must not forget our important distinction between believing a scripture truth, and any fallible explanation of it.*

This is the genius of the reformation led by Stone and Campbell. We unite on what the Bible actually says, what is expressly stated, especially in reference to the fundamentals of the faith. We allow liberty of opinion when it comes to deducing conclusions from what is expressly stated. There is often a big difference between what Scripture says and what somebody says it says. But that is OK, Stone concedes, so long as he is not pushy about such opinions.

Alexander Campbell calls the following definition his “favorite and oft repeated”: *A Christian is one that habitually believes all that Christ says, and habitually does all that he bids him.* (*Mill. Harb.*, 1837, p. 566)

This definition grew out of the criticism he received from the now famous Lunenburg Letter in which he allowed that there must be unimmersed Christians in the sects. In that letter he gave a definition for a Christian that is better known than the one above, but we repeat it here: “But who is a Christian? I answer, Every one that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will.” (*Mill. Harb.*, 1837, p. 411)

To recognize that one may *habitually* obey Christ even when his knowledge is defective in some areas is to face up to what is obvious. It is true of us all. We are all ignorant about some things, and so our obedience is less than perfect. If we would *habitually* obey “in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will,” we could lay claim to the name Christian, and it is reasonable to suppose that there can be no other basis for unity and fellowship.

In the context of Campbell’s first definition (*Mill. Harb.*, 1837, p. 565) he warns against judging those “who would die for Christ” because they have not been immersed, perhaps because they do not yet understand. They often show piety and Christ-likeness that is lacking in those who would judge them. He says frankly that he expects to see such ones in heaven. And this comes from one who championed baptism by immersion as much as any churchman in history.

The last definition I give here comes from Thomas Campbell in his *Declaration and Address*”. His great statement about the nature of the church also defines a Christian.

“The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.”

This is the most demanding definition of all, both for the church and a Christian. Campbell is saying that a church is not really a Church of Christ unless it bears the likeness of Jesus in the lives of its members. How many churches would this leave out? And who may be “properly called” a Christian? One who obeys Christ in all things “according to the Scriptures” (not necessarily the opinions of men), and who exemplify Christ in temperament and conduct.

We can learn from our fathers in the faith to avoid a false emphasis and to point to what is really crucial in being a Christian.

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 22, No. 5; May 1980)

Chapter 40

## “Our Brothers in the Denominations”

*Leroy Garrett*

“Brethren in all denominations.” All these years most of us in the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches have not allowed ourselves to talk like that. Even if we might think it, and most of us probably do, we do not say it. It is our unwritten creed that our sisters and brothers are all in what we call the Church of Christ. While we often refer to “the denominations,” in contrast to “the Lord’s church” (meaning us!), we do not refer to our brethren in the denominations. In this short piece I want to show that this sectarian mentality is of recent date, for our founding fathers did not have this narrow view of brotherhood.

The phrase is in quotation marks because it is taken from Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address*, which dates back to 1809 and is one of our founding documents. The *Address* is in fact written “To all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, throughout all the Churches.” It is clear that he considers those in all the churches who love the Lord Jesus Christ as his brothers and sisters. Time and again in the document he refers to “our brethren” and “our brethren in all the denominations,” and at least once he refers to them as “Our dear brethren in all the denominations.” While he recognizes that they are divided into parties, he still refers to them as “our Christian brethren, however unhappily distinguished by party names.”

He refers to these brethren in the denominations as both the Christian Church and Church of Christ, such as “so that we might return to the original constitutional unity of the Christian Church,” and “all the churches of Christ which mutually acknowledge each other as such.” He is not calling any one denomination or even all of them together the Church of Christ, but rather the Christians in all the denominations. What he sees as the Church of Christ transcends any sect or denomination.

That is the basis upon which he set forth in the same document his first great proposition on unity, often quoted by our people through the years: “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”

Thomas Campbell did not suppose he had to refer to “the Church of Christ” with a lower case c, as our folk are wont to do, supposing that by using “the church of Christ” they are affirming nondenominational status. In all such references as those above Campbell consistently uses the capital C for church, whether Church of Christ or Christian Church, as I notice most scholars do when they refer to the church universal. It says something about where we’ve been (or not been) when we fastidiously use “the church of Christ” and refer to less than all Christians, while others use “the Church of Christ” when referring to the universal church made up of all believers.

Campbell also says in the *Declaration and Address*, “This, we are persuaded, is the uniform sentiment of the real Christians of every denomination,” referring to his plea for unity among all believers. This explains why the Stone-Campbell movement was an effort to “unite the Christians in all the sects.” They were not trying to unite or amalgamate the denominations, but to unite “the real Christians” in the denominations.

It is impressive that Campbell did all this writing about “the Church of Christ” while he yet did not have a single congregation that would eventually wear this name. This means he saw the true church as made up of all his dear brethren wherever they were and whatever party name they might be wearing, and this church has always existed, ever since the Holy Spirit breathed it into existence.

It not only existed, but it was by its very nature one, even if scattered among the sects. Christ’s body cannot be divided! And so he wrote in that document, “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”

It would be wonderfully liberating if we could all, like Thomas Campbell, refer to “our dear brothers and sisters in the denominations,” and realize that we are all together the true Church of Christ upon earth.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 32, No. 3; March 1990)*

Chapter 41

## What is “Our Fellowship”?

*Leroy Garrett*

I seem to be hearing and reading it more these days, not less, and I think somebody should ask for a definition. What is meant by “our fellowship” anyhow? On the front cover of *Firm Foundation*, for example, there is a picture of Kenyans who had gathered for a school. The editor explains that not all in the picture are “members of our fellowship,” for some belong to African independent churches. Inside the journal, where the mission to Kenya is described in detail, the same language appears, distinguishing “our” fellowship from the independent churches of Africa.

But this is not to gang up on the *Firm Foundation*, where this kind of talk appears now and again, for I find it in publications among Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches as well – and of course in religious journals at large where *fellowship* and *denomination* are used interchangeably. And if such language appears in this journal, I include myself in the question I am raising.

What kind of talk is this? It looks for the world like *fellowship* has become a euphemism for *denomination*. We dare not say “our denomination” since we are nondenominational (so we claim), so we find “fellowship” a useful alternative. We in Churches of Christ are even uncomfortable in saying “our church.” But even our leaders seem to be at home with “our fellowship.” And I’ve noticed that Christian Church leaders, who are equally uneasy with the word *denomination*, have been using the euphemism, *fellowship*, for a long time. It is well nigh common lingo among Christian Churches.

There is an odd development for a people who claim to speak as the scriptures speak and to call Bible things by Bible names. The term fellowship appears in scripture, to be sure, but never in the way we are now using it. There is, for instance, in Philip. 1:1 the “fellowship of the Spirit,” but most of us agree that such a fellowship includes all those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Surely there are some in whom the Spirit dwells among the “African independent churches,” as well as in those of “our fellowship.” So I take it that the *Firm Foundation* does not refer to the fellowship of the Spirit when it refers to “our fellowship.” In this context “our fellowship” must mean the same as “Church of Christ,” or to be more candid, “our denomination” as distinguished from the African denominations.

Then too the Bible is clear as to how we enter the fellowship of the Spirit. We are called into it by God himself according to 1 Cor. 1:9: “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” And 2 Thess. 2:14 shows that God calls us “through the gospel.” It follows, then, that God calls us into the fellowship (or the church) when we hear and obey the gospel. If there is but one church, there is but one fellowship, just as there is but one gospel that calls us.

If there is but one fellowship, which is the one church, why all this talk about “our fellowship?” All God’s children, whether in Kenya or in Texas, are in the fellowship, which is the only one there is – the only one, that is, that God calls us to be a part of! I have no interest in belonging to any other.

In God's sight there is no such thing as a "Church of Christ" or a "Christian Church" or a "Presbyterian Church," for there is only his Body, which is the church, the fellowship of the Spirit.

If any of us have a fellowship apart from the one that 1 John 1:3 refers to ("our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"), then we may presume to exercise control over it, accepting whom we will and "withdrawing" from whom we will. But we have no control over the fellowship of the Spirit, for it embraces all those in whom the Spirit dwells. And if it is God who calls people into that fellowship through the Gospel, it is only God that can exclude them. Jesus is described as the one "who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one will open," (Rev. 3:7) which makes it risky for us to be in the business of opening and shutting. *He* controls the fellowship and not ourselves. We, therefore, have a lot of soul searching to do in all this "withdrawing fellowship" that goes on. If Jesus "opens" to someone, it is futile for us to try to slam the door on him. *None can shut!* Thank God for that. Except for that glorious truth I would have been out long ago!

*None can open* is an equally pungent truth. Just because some church accepts a man or he receives applause from "our fellowship" doesn't mean that Jesus has opened to him.

Let's face it. If we use *fellowship* to refer to anything less than the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church throughout the world, we are using it in a sectarian sense. There is no such thing as "our fellowship" except in terms of a sect, whether in Kenya or in Texas. Of course we may refer to the fellowship that we enjoy together in any congregation as "our fellowship," but even then we recognize that the fellowship, which is the one church, embraces all God's children everywhere, and we are communing with them as well as with each other, wherever they may be gathered. 1 John 1 seems to have some such view:

"What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 20, No. 10; Dec. 1979)

Chapter 42

# Are We to Fellowship the Christian Church?

*Leroy Garrett*

An article in the July issue of *Spiritual Sword*, published by Getwell Church of Christ in Memphis, entitled “Should We Fellowship the Christian Church?” caught my eye. The article concludes with a ringing assertion that *We can have no fellowship with the Christian Church!*

One could hardly find a better (or should I say worse?) example of what has happened to the Church of Christ mentality in reference to that beautiful word fellowship than in this article. In the very question raised there is a crucial misunderstanding of the meaning of fellowship, for “the sharing of the common life,” which is what the word means, is between persons, not institutions or organizations.

Presuming that the “We” in the question is the Church of Christ, I would have to agree that the Church of Christ cannot fellowship the Christian Church, or vice versa for that matter. In the light of Scripture, *Koinonia* (fellowship) is only between persons and between persons and God. Christians are in fellowship only with each other and the Lord, not denominations or religious bodies.

The Bible could hardly be clearer than it is on this truth, such as: “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Indeed, even the construction of the English translation indicates this; *ship* suggests relationship, as in companionship and friendship. So *fellow* and *ship* is a relationship between fellows. It is a people thing (and people and God), not an institutional thing.

The question raised reminds me of those George Whitefield would ask of Abraham in his preaching back in Colonial America, which anticipated some of the thinking of the StoneCampbell Movement which came along generations later. “Father Abraham, have you any Episcopalians in heaven?” he would ask. Abraham would answer in the negative. No Episcopalians in heaven. “Any Presbyterians?” Whitefield would go on asking. No Presbyterians, Abraham would reply. On and on Whitefield would go, naming the various sects. Finally Abraham would say, “We have only Christians here!”

In a similar vein I would say that we are not in fellowship with Presbyterians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, or whatever, but only with Christians. But surely we are in fellowship with all Christians, including those that are “not of us.” They do not have to be “of us” but only “of Christ,” and all those who are “of Christ” are in fellowship with each other.

An equally damaging fallacy in the question “Are we to fellowship the Christian Church?” is the implication that fellowship is a commodity at our disposal and over which we have control. It implies that *Koinonia* is ours to extend or to withdraw. While this is true of approval or

endorsement, it cannot be true of fellowship, for only God determines its parameters and only He determines who is in the fellowship and who is not.

Again, the Scriptures are clear in this regard, as in 1 Cor. 1:9: “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is God who calls us into Christian fellowship, and 2 Thess. 2:14 reminds that we received that call when we heard and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. If God calls us to *Koinonia* by way of the gospel, how much do men have to do with it? And on what grounds can men determine who is in the fellowship and who is not? Is fellowship ours to extend and withdraw at will?

Part of the problem here is that fellowship is confused with approval or endorsement. True, one may not approve or endorse what some denomination teaches or practices, but this has little or nothing to do with fellowship, which is a relationship that exists between a person and God and with other persons. I may not endorse the error that is espoused by a fellow Christian, but we may still be within the fellowship of Christ together. It was so in New Testament times. Paul so disapproved of the conduct of Peter on one occasion that he afterward wrote “I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 1:11). But they were still in Christ together and still in fellowship.

### Choosing Brothers

Another way to put it is that we can no more monitor who is in our fellowship than we can pass on who is in our family. My father begot and my mother gave birth to eight children. That made the eight of us brothers and sisters. I was next to the last to be born. When the baby of the family came along six years after I was born, no one asked if I would receive him into the family. I was not consulted. I had nothing to do with his becoming my brother. I was stuck with him. We were brothers, not because we approved of each other, but because we had the same parents. How we would get along in the ensuing years would depend on what brotherhood meant to us and whether we received and loved each other as brothers ought, even when we disagreed.

It is that way in God’s family. We are begotten of the Word and born of water and the Spirit. God is our Father and the New Jerusalem is “the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). This brings us into “the fellowship of the Spirit” (Philip. 2:1). It is the Spirit’s fellowship, not ours. In whatever heart the Spirit dwells there is *Koinonia*. If the Spirit dwells in you and in me, then we are in the fellowship together. The same thing that makes us Christians makes us *fellows together in Christ, hence fellowship*. Whether we yet like each other or agree with each other or approve of each other is another matter. There are many brothers who are not on speaking terms, but they are nonetheless brothers. So it is in Christ. We can accept each other as fellows in Christ when we may not yet choose to be close friends. I may even believe that you are “in error” on some matters (Who isn’t?), but that does not negate the fact of brotherhood and fellowship. We are stuck with each other, but our mutual love for Christ should constrain us to “Receive one another, even as Christ has received you” (Rom. 15:7).

If we are concerned that we might be in fellowship with “brothers in error,” it helps to realize that we have no other kind. We are slow to believe the plain words of James 3:2, “We all stumble in many things,” and 1 John 1:8, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not

in us.” Who among us can say, in the light of such passages, that he does not stumble and sin? Can we not then enjoy fellowship with each other when we are far less than perfect?

We hear much of “withdrawing fellowship,” so much so that one would suppose it is a biblical concept. These days we even have churches that “withdraw” from other churches. There is nothing like that in the New Testament, and “withdrawing fellowship” or its equivalent is nowhere found. Rom. 16:17 makes mention of certain factionists that were to be “marked” and “avoided,” a measure taken to secure the peace of the young church, but there is no reference to fellowship as such. To “mark” a problem brother is simply to take note of him, and to “avoid” him is to not allow him to do his disruptive work. He is still a brother and still in the fellowship, but he has become a problem and must be dealt with as such.

The “withdrawal” text is presumed to be 2 Thess. 3:6, which in the KJV reads “withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly,” and of course “disorderly” is made to refer to everything from getting a divorce to using a piano in church. But the context makes it clear that the apostle was referring to people who didn’t do their fair share of the work, which led him to say that if one would not work he should not eat. Most any other translation will make it clear that this is no injunction to “withdraw fellowship” from certain ones and thus kick them out of the church. Such as the *New English Bible*: “Hold aloof from every Christian brother who falls into idle habits.” Verse 11 of the same chapter further describes the “disorderly” as “not working at all, but are busybodies.” We can warn such ones (see 1 Thess. 5:14), discipline such ones, and “hold aloof” such ones without presuming to exclude them from the fellowship of Christ. This is apparent from 1 Thess. 3:14-15 where Paul goes on to tell the church not to keep company with these idlers, then adds “Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

Only the One who calls us into the fellowship of the Spirit can cast us from that fellowship. Only Christ can remove the candlestick from a church, and only Christ can cast a member from his Body, for only he is its head. A church can and should of course discipline its members in love, as the above verses indicate, but this need not involve “withdrawing fellowship,” which is the prerogative of no one, however much it is assumed by popes, councils, and elderships.

While the expulsion of the fornicator in 1 Cor. 5 is sometimes cited as a proof text for this pontifical behavior, its situation is so unique that it hardly serves as a pattern for the modern church. In the first place, it was a personal representative of Jesus Christ that did it, the apostle Paul, which cannot be duplicated by any modern church. Paul said that even though he was absent he had already judged in the case (verse 3), and their action was based on Paul being present “in spirit,” and so the evil doer was delivered unto Satan, just as if the apostle himself issued the condemnation. What congregation today can presume to deliver one of its member unto Satan?

We might deduct from 1 Cor. 5 that it would be appropriate for a congregation to recognize publicly that certain ones have conducted themselves in such a way that it is presumed that they have cut themselves off from Christ and therefore from His church and from the fellowship of that congregation. But even this must be done with great caution and with guarded words, for since we are fallible we can never really know when one has been cut off from Christ. What we must make clear is that only Christ can remove the candlestick either from a church or from the life of an individual. We can only say that when it appears that this has happened, we want to act consistent with that and thus remove the person’s name from our register and no longer regard him as a

brother. But we must never forget that one may be excommunicated by a church whom Christ has not excommunicated.

The brother's question about having fellowship with the Christian Church raises one further point: we seem more inclined to draw the line of fellowship than to obey the injunction of Scripture: *Accept one another, even as Christ has accepted you* (Rom. 15:7). We should think positively in terms of accepting those with whom we differ than in terms of rejecting them. Is that not more Christ like? If Christ were as hard on us as we are on each other, where would we be?

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## Chapter 43

# I Would Abdicate

*Leroy Garrett*

The story is told about Ludwig von Mises, the great economist, when he was asked what he would do about the economy, conditions being as unfavorable as they were, if he by some fate were made dictator of the United States. His immediate reply: *I would abdicate!*

I want to ride the coattail of that idea in reference to my own role in the current efforts to restore unity, brotherhood and love to our divided ranks in Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. I am part of the fellowship of the concerned ones in that I want something done about our lack of oneness. I am editing this journal and traveling over the country because I care and because I believe that Jesus' prayer for the unity of his people is glorious to anticipate. I have hope and so I am at work. The church can be one, and the place for us to start in realizing that unity is in our own ranks and among our own people. Once this is realized, we will have an important witness to make to the world. Jesus' words should sober us: "Hereby shall men know that you are my disciples because you love one another."

It is only in this sense that I think of myself as a reformer. I am not out to save the brotherhood, nor to conform anyone else to my way of thinking. I do not presume to know all the answers. I only want to help our people to become freer and more responsible in their relationship to the religious world. It is not important that they think like me, but it is important that they *think*. Change is in order, though I don't presume to dictate those changes. We must become more responsible, but I would not be so irresponsible as to lay down all the rules. I only want to be part of the answer, and I hope that this journal may be a channel through which possible answers will be explored. Our brotherhood needs to become a vast open forum, and I wish to contribute what I can to that end.

The best way for any of us to help solve the problems we face is to be busy improving ourselves. Reformation begins within each of us, with each one making those changes that the light of his own conscience dictates. God forbid that we keep on sitting in judgment on one another. If each of us will make of himself, by God's help, part of that light that shines in the world, then our ministry will be to those who love light more than darkness, people who are drawn to us because of the light we have.

One cultivated in Christian graces will not impose himself on others. He will not be so rude nor presumptuous as to try to remake people into his own image. He will not be out to judge them nor to show them how wrong they are. He will not even be aggressive in presenting his own viewpoint. Rather he will be busy attending to his own affairs, setting his own house in order, and holding a candle in his own little corner of our darkened world. Those who seek light will find their way to him. This was the way Jesus did, you know. He was always a gentleman, never imposing himself nor his views on anyone. He did things like going into the hills and praying all night, keeping his relationship with God in good repair. And yet people flocked to him for wisdom, for light, for healing. Jesus must have been something like Ludwig von Mises in that even if they had made him

the dictator over their lives, so that every annoying detail would have been settled by a nod of his head, he would have abdicated.

Here I take my stand. If by some fate I were made dictator over the Churches of Christ, so that every change I long for would readily come to pass at my command, I would abdicate. I do not want to win by enslaving men, but by freeing them. Real victory is not mastery over men's minds, but the defeat of those things that tyrannize men's minds.

Our differences will not be settled by any one party among us arrogating to itself the power of judging all others. We are each prone to say of the other, when he dares to see things different from ourselves, that he doesn't know as we know or that he doesn't love as we love. Editorials in some of our journals charge that those who see the Bible, or the Bible's silence as the case may be, different from the editor do not really respect the authority of the Bible. To respect the authority of the scriptures is to interpret as I interpret, is what that says. We even impugn people's motives if they see other than we see. If they are knowledgeable, then they must be insincere, if they differ from us. It is, after all, merely a matter of taking the Bible for what it says or for what it doesn't say! We little realize that "what the Bible says" is what we, in our sectarian littleness make say.

The issue really is not who knows more or who loves more or who respects the Bible more. The issue is whether I am to sit in judgment of you or you of me. It is a question of which of our parties will presume to serve as the supreme court for all the rest of us. Suppose we establish a judgment seat somewhere in the brotherhood – at Abilene or Nashville or Louisville or Lufkin – so that all our differences will be resolved and unity realized. Which of our parties will assume to serve as the supreme court? If such were proffered, the wisdom of von Mises would be in order, abdication.

When the apostle Paul deals with the problem of difference between Christians in Romans 14 this is really what he calls for, *abdication of judgment*. Several times he says such as "Who are you to pass judgment on someone else's servant?" and "Let us therefore cease judging one another." He is saying that we are to dethrone ourselves as judge and enthrone God, for it is God who is Master over men's souls and not ourselves. Paul's answer is a "To each his own" approach, for in this way one is responsible in his own conscience to God and no one else. This is the freedom we all should seek, to be responsible for our beliefs, whether to their sincerity or their soundness, only to God and ourselves.

This is the wisdom of Paul's words: "It is before his own master that he stands or falls." Maybe he is not sincere. Maybe he does have ulterior motives. But it is not for us to judge for the simple reason that we are not his master. His own conscience is his supreme court and God is his only judge.

Even if a brother should make us the master of his thought and the judge of his life, we should abdicate.

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 13, No. 9; Nov. 1971)

## Chapter 44

# A Basic Fallacy to Overcome

*Leroy Garrett*

Most of us concede that the primitive church was united. If it consisted of splintered sects there would be little reason to “restore” it. While present-day scholarship points to the diversity of the New Testament church, it nonetheless recognizes a basic unity in that diversity. There was racial diversity in that some were Jews and some were Gentiles; there was social diversity in that some were rich and some were poor, some were free and some were slaves. There were ideological differences in that some came out of paganism, and were slow to give up some of its practices, while others had strong Judaistic foundations, and they too clung to some of its ritual after becoming believers. There were also theological differences, some being “liberal” and others “conservative.”

It strikes us as unlikely that one “Church of Christ” minister would circumcise another as a religious rite, and yet this was the case with Paul and Timothy. Nor is it likely that a “gospel preacher” would finance and take part in a service at the Jewish temple in which vows were made, heads shaved, and sacrifices offered, as the apostle Paul did.

And if we are in search of the pattern church to restore, we have our problems, for we have everything from speaking in tongues and baptism for the dead to communal living and love feasts. It can really be haunting to realize that members were struck dead for their sins, as in the Jerusalem church, or sickened and died for “not discerning the Body,” as in the Corinthian church. Do we want to restore that kind of retribution to the 20th century church?

The fact is that we are not all that much like the primitive churches, but, then again, they were not much like each other. There are some vast differences between the church in Jerusalem and the one in Corinth. And when we take the congregations across the board we can hardly come up with a consistent *Order*, whether in reference to organization, name, corporate worship, or life style.

But still we can speak of their unity, which goes far in identifying the nature of unity. It certainly cannot mean seeing everything eye to eye. Paul could lay down the principle, *All are one in Christ Jesus*, as he referred to the diverse elements (Gal. 3:28). If in that context he could write “There is neither male nor female,” which points up the greatest diversity of all, considering the status of the woman in Paul’s culture, then we in the 20th century should be prepared to accept the church as united that is very diverse.

Once we grant the unity of the earliest church in spite of its considerable diversity, we are left with the question of the ground upon which it was united. Herein we can identify the basic fallacy, especially among Churches of Christ and Christian Churches, in our efforts toward unity. It is the assumption that unity is based upon the New Testament, which is made to mean a particular interpretation of that portion of Scripture. Even though we are divided into different camps in reference to it, we insist that there is an identifiable *Order* in the New Testament, and when we “restore” that Order we have unity. That such a plea has never been effective and has left its own advocates divided several different ways does not impede its advocacy.

That unity never has been and never can be based upon a common understanding of New Testament literature is evident enough in the story of the primitive church. The early Christians were united and yet they did not have what we call the “New Testament.” How could their unity be based upon what they did not even have? The only Scriptures that the earliest Christians knew anything about was the Old Testament, which can hardly be seen as the basis of their unity and fellowship. Even with the close of the first century there was no recognized canon for the new Testament, and it was at least another century before there was anything like a mutual acceptance of what constituted the New Testament.

Even when there was a “complete” Bible it could hardly be the basis of unity for the simple reason that the rank and file did not have access to it. The blessing we have of looking up something in the Bible goes back no further than the fifteenth century and the invention of the printing press. Even then however the vast majority of believers were too poor to have a Bible of their own. Throughout most of the history of the church the New Testament has not been sufficiently at hand to serve as the bond of union among Christians.

To be sure Christians through the centuries, including those of the earliest church, gathered to hear the Scriptures read, which gradually came to include the New Testament. But this hardly provided for the detailed knowledge of doctrinal issues that is demanded by those who make such knowledge the basis of fellowship. One could hardly be blamed for not being “up on all the issues” when he had no Bible of his own to study. We can only conclude that the contextual knowledge of the earliest Christians of what we now call the New Testament was very limited. Their faith was centered mostly in the fundamental facts of the gospel and what they could learn about Jesus Christ from those who had known him.

## **The Ground of Unity**

This can only mean that Jesus Christ himself was the basis of their faith and the ground of their unity. It was not so much ideas or doctrines about him that united them, but the Christ himself. While we can believe they sought out every crumb of information about Jesus, whether the miracles he wrought or the parables he taught, they did not have to attain a perfect understanding of such things in order to “sanctify Christ Jesus in your hearts as Lord.” The person of Christ is larger than anything and everything that was written about him, and it was this, what Jesus was, that gave the church both its unity and its power.

In whatever generation it is the faithful response to Jesus’ call “Come, follow me” that makes us disciples. When those who became his apostles responded to that call they did not know much about Jesus, but they knew him. Even when we do not yet know much about the church or baptism or prayer we are Jesus’ disciples when we resolve to forsake all and follow him. Surely we are united with all others who take that same step.

This does not minimize the body of doctrine that the early church eventually came to believe. It only puts it in proper perspective. Sound doctrine strengthened the unity and deepened the fellowship. It built up their faith and buttressed their hope. But it was not the basis of their unity in Christ or their fellowship with each other, for this would have restricted unity and fellowship only to those with a certain level of understanding. They were all enrolled in the school of Christ because of their mutual response to the gospel, but they were at different grade levels. To change the metaphor, some were

on milk and some solid food. But as in our own families the babes and the mature are one, not because of their level of knowledge but because they have the same parents.

There we have the essence of it. Wherever God has children we have brothers and sisters. We are all united in Christ if we be his disciples, not because of anything we have done but because of what God has done. God's retarded children are as much my sisters and brothers as the bright ones. Even those who out of weakness follow Christ afar off are my spiritual kin. I have brothers in error as well as brothers who are right about everything.

That unity is based upon agreement on the New Testament is a fallacy because it is something that never has been and never can be. As late as 200 A.D. there was still no New Testament canon and some "books" we now accept as Scripture were still treated as doubtful. It wasn't until about 369 A.D. that there was an accepted New Testament such as we now have. It therefore could not have been the basis of the church's unity up to that time. Even if there had been such a New Testament then as we have now, and even if there was perfect agreement on its content, such unanimity could never have been the basis of Christian unity. If a book could have done it, any book, then Christ would not have needed to die.

Thank God that he did not give a book to save the world, but he gave himself in the form of a Person. That Person is the ground of our faith, the basis of our unity, and the source of our hope. There is a Book, a glorious revelation, that tells us of that Person. But it is the wonderful Person of the Bible rather than the Bible itself that unites us. That Book is like a map or a telescope by which or through which we see the Christ. We tragically err when we lose Christ in the Book, allowing some set of "faithful doctrines," which are often only the opinions of some sect, to eclipse the very one the Bible was intended to reveal.

Robert Richardson says some other things that relate to the thesis I am making herein. I will close this article with several quotations from his piece on "Reformation" in the *Millennial Harbinger* (1847, p. 508).

"Men seem to have lost sight of the obvious distinction which is to be made between the Bible and the Gospel."

"It should never be forgotten that the Apostles and first preachers of the gospel had no Bibles, and not even a New Testament, to distribute; and that there was no such thing among the early Christians as a formal union upon the 'Bible alone.' Nay rather it was a union upon the Gospel alone."

"Let the Bible be our spiritual library; but let the Gospel be our standard of orthodoxy. Let the Bible be our test of Christian character and perfection, but let the Christian confession be our formula of Christian adoption and of Christian union. In a word, let the Bible be to us every thing designated by its Author, but let 'Christ crucified' be not only our peace with God, but our peace with one another."

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 28, No. 9; Nov. 1986)

Chapter 45

## Can We be United and not Know It?

*Leroy Garrett*

In this short article I pose a question that brews in my mind: Might the unity for which our Lord prayed come as subtly and unpredictably as the kingdom itself? Or to put it another way, might unity, like the kingdom, be in our midst and at work among us and we not recognize it? Is the unity for which Jesus prayed real even if not realized?

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God surely emphasizes the mystery of both its nature and the manner of its coming. He told his disciples that if he cast out demons, which he was doing, then the kingdom was already in their midst (Mt. 12:28). It was like leaven already at work in the dough and like the mustard seed that grows into a great tree (Mt. 13:31-33), which indicates power and mystery as well as subtlety. Yet he says, "The kingdom does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:20-21).

The kingdom was already within them and they knew it not! And it did not come in ordinary ways of observation. It did not come in the way their theologians said it must. And yet to Jesus the kingdom was future as well as present. His disciples were to pray "Thy kingdom come." The kingdom is apparently a continuing unfolding reality of the power and wisdom of God.

My question is whether the unity that Jesus prayed for might be that way. If the kingdom of God was a reality amidst Jesus' first followers without their realizing it, might not the unity of the Spirit be ours as a gift without our realizing it?

Unity is not ours to achieve or create. It is not the accomplishment of unity forums or ecumenical conclaves, however important these may be. It is not even ecclesiastical or organizational, such as a merging of churches, though these may result from unity. Can we suppose that unity, like the kingdom, does not necessarily come by observation nor in the ways we might expect? Since unity is the fruit of the Holy Spirit we can liken it unto the wind that comes and goes in ways that we cannot comprehend.

Believers of diverse backgrounds meet to study and pray, drawn together by a mutual devotion to Jesus Christ. Isn't this unity? Churches down the street from each other cooperate in alleviating human suffering both at home and abroad, all in the name of Christ. Isn't that unity? Young people from different denominations have a great time together in the Lord at camp or in redecorating a poor family's home. Isn't that unity? We lend a helping hand to a fellow believer who is hurting, and we see Christ in each other's lives. Isn't that unity?

We can believe that God is already at work answering the prayer of His Son, "Father, may they be one even as we are one." He is at work, like the leaven is at work or like the growing mustard seed, making His people one. It may not be "See, there it is!" at some unity conference, or "See, here it is!" at some ecumenical convention. It may be far more subtle and mysterious in its coming, such as when we start listening to each other and treating each other as equals. It may come when we are

on our knees praying for each other. It may come as we hunger and thirst for it deep within our souls. Or simply being in Christ together, however separated by distance and circumstance.

Unity, like the kingdom, is both present and future. It is here and yet it is coming. Like the rose in bud it is yet to bloom with even more glory. And in ways and in a manner that is beyond our fondest dreams and wildest expectations. The ultimate unity of all God's people both in this world and the world to come will thrill our souls beyond description, a kind of "Wow! What an answer to our Lord's prayer!"

But unity, again like the kingdom, comes as we draw upon God's resources to make it come. We are to pray for it, have a passion for it, and work for it. And we are to accept it as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift that we share with all those who are in Christ. God is at work in us. He will see that the gift behaves like leaven and like mustard seed.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 33, No. 3; March 1991)*

Chapter 46

## Separated But not Divided

*Leroy Garrett*

I recall years ago when I was teaching at Bethany College that Perry Gresham, then the president of that institution, told some of us that the leaders of the church around the world should gather and issue a joint proclamation that *the church is united!*

That is what Thomas Campbell said in his “Declaration and Address,” which dates back to 1809 and is one of the founding documents of our Movement. “The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one,” he wrote. He saw the church united as a reality, not simply as an ideal. It is the nature of the church to be one; it cannot be other than one. It is an extension of the apostle’s affirmation, by way of a question, in 1 Cor. 1:13, *Is Christ divided?*

Campbell and Gresham were taking a page from Paul. Christ cannot be divided. The church as the Body of Christ is one. There may be sects imposing themselves upon that Body. There may be schisms within its ranks, threatening the life of that Body. But still the church is there, withstanding the onslaught of “the gates of Hades,” and it is one.

Here is another “catholic” (yes, indeed, Campbell and Gresham were speaking as “catholics” in referring to the church as necessarily one) that has long been witnessing to the church at large of its inherent oneness. David J. Du Plessis is now 80. Sometime back the pope gave him a gold medal in tribute to his message of unity to the whole church, and Fuller Seminary has now named a Center for him, which will serve as a depository of his books and papers as an envoy of peace among and beyond all denominations. I say “beyond” because his own denomination, the Assemblies of God, excommunicated him when he began to work within the World Council of Churches, only to reinstate him years later when they saw that he was right in insisting that the Pentecostals were not the only Christians.

He says it was a blessing when the Assemblies defrocked him, for he was then in a position to be truly ecumenical. Though a Pentecostal in persuasion and practice, he had been busy all these years telling any denomination that will listen that the Body of Christ is beyond them all, and that all who are in Christ are one in that Body. And that includes the Roman Catholics. When word reached the ears of Cardinal Bea in Rome that David Du Plessis was saying things “that Rome needs to hear,” he was invited to the Holy See. He told Rome that unity is in no denomination, no system, no hierarchy, but only in the Holy Spirit. That did not keep the pope, who presides over a system that traditionally holds that unity is possible only in the Holy See, from honoring him as a man of peace and unity.

When Cardinal Bea called Du Plessis a holy man, he protested. But the cardinal insisted, “Since you are a man of the Holy Spirit, you must be a holy man.”

When they asked Du Plessis about the “How” of unity, he responded with “Our unity is not based on how; our unity is based on Who.” He stresses that since there is but one Head there can be but

one Body. The basis of renewal, he says, is in that great promise “Behold, I make all things new,” and renewal, he says, is an ongoing process. To all the denominations he presses home the point, Do not think you have arrived.

While Du Plessis is Pentecostal and believes in glossolalia, he is persuaded that Christians can differ on such things and find their oneness in the person of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit within us that makes us one, not theological conformity, he says.

And he says this as if it were his motto, *Be separated but not divided*, which is similar to a saying of our own pioneers, *We are free to differ but not to divide*. Du Plessis sees nothing wrong in our separations so long as we accept each other as equals in Christ. He points to his own family as an example. Even though the parents and their six children and the grandchildren are all scattered, still they are united. This is not only expressed with get-togethers on special occasions and by frequent contacts by phone but also by a constant acceptance of each other. It can be the same with Christians. Our love and acceptance of each other will transcend denominational loyalties.

I am convinced that Du Plessis’ approach to unity is the only one that will prove effective, and it is really the “Stone-Campbell ” position as it was originally set forth. We do not work for unity; we rather accept the Spirit’s gift of unity to the church. We are already united with all those who are in Christ. We are one with all those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. We are not united with Baptists nor Methodists nor Church of Christ members but with Christians, all Christians everywhere. Such unity rises above all the sectarian and denominational barriers. Unity is between believers, not structures nor systems nor ecclesiasticisms.

Can it really be any other way? Has it ever been any other way? Wasn’t the unity of the early church a “separated but not divided” unity? Was it not so with Paul and Barnabas – separated but not divided? And with Paul and Peter and all those who were “somewhat” in the church – he went his way to the circumcised and they went theirs, separated but not divided. And there are the churches that probably could not have successfully gathered under the same roof, such as Jerusalem and Antioch, but still they were united in Christ, separated but not divided. We all know Christians with whom we had rather not work. They are there and we are here, and it is better that way. But we love and accept each other, separated but not divided.

This is not the same as separatism, which is a separation that says, “Unless you see and do as I see and do I will not accept you as an equal.” Separatism dictates no fellowship, no association, no cooperation, no recognition. Separatism is an exclusivism that assumes to have arrived and to have all the truth, and to have anything to do with others would be “fellowshipping error.”

An attitude of “separated but not divided” recognizes that because of tradition, race, social status, personal preference, or longstanding theological differences “they” are there and “we” are here, and that this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. But still, because of our common *loyalty to Christ* (Can there really be any other test?), we can recognize and treat each other as equals in Christ and perhaps do some things together. While we may not be able to do everything together, we can surely do some things together.

Differences, mostly those passed along to us by our forebears, may keep us separated, but they do not have to divide us in heart and mind. It is being *against* another that makes for division, while

separation may only be circumstantial. Most blacks, for example, do not care to assemble with whites, and many poor Christians are not comfortable in rich churches. Separation without division is, therefore, possible so long as no one is *against* anybody. This assumes that division, which is named a sin in Scripture, is in the heart and head of man and not merely in outward circumstances. Jesus seemed to think this way when he said “He who is not against me is for me.”

*Separated but not divided!* It might at least serve as a fresh starting point in our thinking. With time we might flesh it out to mean, *Separated by circumstances but equal in Christ*. Is that not the way it is with all those that believe that Jesus is Lord and who obey him in all things according to their understanding, to quote Alexander Campbell?

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 27, No. 5; May 1985)

Chapter 47

# The One Church Indivisible

*Leroy Garrett*

*Is Christ divided?* 1 Cor. 1:13

*One nation indivisible* Pledge of Allegiance

I was telling Ouida about some things I had learned about Abraham Lincoln, and concluded by saying I might have to write an article about it. Well, here is the article, which is inspired by Lincoln's undying conviction in the indivisible character of the nation over which he served as President. As I said to Ouida, "If we could but see the unity of the church as Lincoln saw the unity of the nation..." Paul apparently did, for it seemed impossible to him that Christ or the Body of Christ could be divided.

If ever we had a leader who saw the United States as "One nation indivisible," it was Abraham Lincoln. It was this principle of unity that bore him through the four grueling years of the Civil War, which left him drained and worn. When he first campaigned for the presidency, he made it clear that his intention was neither to end slavery nor to preserve it but rather to "preserve the Union." This became his obsession. But the legislature in South Carolina did not believe him. To them Abraham Lincoln was bad news, and no sooner did they receive word of his election in 1860 than they seceded from the Union.

Even before Lincoln took office the Confederacy was already formed and eventually eleven of the 33 states of the Union had formed themselves into another nation. Even the mayor of New York City, which was dependent upon Southern cotton for its mills, threatened to withdraw that city from the Union if the South did.

It was the principle of the inherent union of the States that controlled Lincoln's mind, both in war and in peace. To him the Confederacy was illegal. There was still but one nation *indivisible*. A state or a city can no more secede than a man can leave his wife. They share in a covenant and in a destiny. To Lincoln secession was unthinkable and intolerable. And whatever else the Civil War accomplished it accomplished that, for no state has ever again assumed the right to secede from the Union.

To Lincoln the United States was not in a war with another nation known as the Confederate States. The United States was at war with itself. It was a very serious and deadly family quarrel. When at Gettysburg he spoke those memorable words "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth," he was referring to all the 33 states of the United States. And when in his second inaugural address he spoke of "bind up the wounds of the nation," he was referring to the North and South alike.

## They Played *Dixie!*

When word reached Washington that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia on April 7, 1865, which was only one week before Lincoln was assassinated, the city celebrated with cannon fire and dancing in the streets. When a large crowd gathered on the White House lawn to honor the President who had preserved the Union, Lincoln appeared, haggard and spent, and called for the band to play *Dixie*, a song that he always admired. The song is ours now, he told the crowd, for we are all one people.

President Lincoln celebrated the end of the Civil War by having the band play *Dixie* on the White House lawn! There is something about that spirit that speaks volumes on the meaning of unity, fellowship, and acceptance.

When those who were vengeful toward the South asked Lincoln how he was going to treat the rebels, he replied, "I will treat them as if they had never left." When Congress debated the conditions on which the rebel states would be received back into the Union, Lincoln suggested that there might be no reason for debate in that those states never really left the Union.

*One nation indivisible!* may well be the crowning principle of our republic. Abraham Lincoln seemed to think so, for he was willing to endure the agonies of a fratricidal war on the basis of it. A divided United States was not a viable option to him.

With such a view of unity and its practical applications Lincoln would have made a good Campbellite, for this was the position held by the leaders of the Stone-Campbell Movement: the church is indivisible. And here let us try once more to lay to rest the unfounded rumor among our people that Abe Lincoln was immersed by John O'Kane, a Disciples minister of Indiana, which is now and again retold in some of our papers. The report that O'Kane baptized Lincoln in private and that the President wanted it kept a secret is a sheer myth, if for no other reason Lincoln was not the kind of person who would be clandestine about something like that. Too, no American's life has been so thoroughly researched as Lincoln's, and if he had ever been baptized and joined any church, however furtively, the scholars would have found it out.

Thomas Campbell launched his movement for the unity of all Christians on the principle that the church by its very nature is indivisible. As he put it in the *Declaration and Address*, our most important founding document: *The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.* He wrote that line in 1809, years before he had his first congregation. He did not say the church *should* be one, or that it *will* be one once he had done his work, but that it is one. Since the church is the Body of Christ it cannot be other than one.

Campbell was not saying that the sects were that church, for no sect can be the Body of Christ. He was saying that the true Christians scattered among all the sects are the Body of Christ, and that they are one because of their relationship to Christ.

The church may be "divided" in the sense that factions, parties, and sects are imposed upon it, but the Body remains one in spite of all the schisms. It is not unlike a marriage in trouble. The couple may even be separated because of their problems, but still they are one, a unity that they must come to appreciate. Lincoln's America may have been severed by civil strife, but it was still a Union as

he saw it. And once the unity is seen and prized, it is less difficult to overcome the debilitating factions.

It is a matter of thinking right about the church. It isn't divided; it can't be. Sects might be, but not the Body of Christ. Lincoln thought of a nation indivisible and he saved the nation. When we think of unity, *The church is one!*, we too will more likely behave like unity minded people.

Did this principle not dominate Paul's mind in his Corinthian correspondence? His resounding question *Is Christ divided?* permeates the entire letter. In spite of factions within the congregation, along with all their other shortcomings, the apostle could still address them as "the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). Moreover, he spoke of them as "the temple of God" in whom the Spirit of God dwells (3:16). This means that to Paul a divided church is a contradiction, for the Body of Christ is one by its very nature. That Body is God's temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, even when some things are not right.

Sometimes when I sit in an assembly of believers in Denton, Texas, I think of the Body of Christ all around the world, especially in distant nations where I have been privileged to visit – a military retreat center in Korea, a bamboo hut in Thailand, an upper room in Japan, a union church in El Salvador, a store front in Taiwan, an ancient Presbyterian church in Geneva, and on and on, including some forty different churches I've recently visited in my own city. These are all the one, indivisible church, I say to myself, not that the church is a composite of all denominations, but, as Paul puts it, "all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Then there is the family of God who is already in heaven, made up of "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9), with whom we are in fellowship. So, the church in heaven and upon earth make up the one, indivisible Body of Christ. It can be no more divided than Christ can be divided.

When this great truth permeates our thinking we will no longer allow ourselves to think in terms of a divided church.

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 30, No. 1; Jan. 1988)

Chapter 48

## Unity *Will* Come, But...

*Leroy Garrett*

I shall always remember my first and only visit to Westminster Abbey in London. Anyone would be impressed with its splendor and the fact that monarchs of yesteryear sleep there, but there was something else, wholly unexpected, that impressed me far more.

On one of the columns near the rear of the chapel was a sign that read *Prayers for Christian Unity in this Chapel Each Tuesday at 3:00 P.M.*

Anglicans praying for the unity of God's church! There was nothing incongruous about it especially, even though for some time in my life I supposed that God did not hear the prayers of Anglicans or Episcopalians. Nor of Presbyterians or Baptists for that matter. I was impressed that people *in any church* would go to the trouble to get together like that and pray for the unity of Christians. I was aware that I had never seen nor heard any such announcement among my own people. Nor had I ever arranged such a gathering myself, not for that purpose alone.

Moreover I *never*, or almost never, hear our people in assembly praying for the unity of Christians. One may conclude that the Church of Christ/Christian Church folk do not treat the scandal of a divided church with a sense of urgency. It seems to have no particular place in our thinking. I may of course be mistaken. If I should visit the Sixth and Izzard Church of Christ in Little Rock and see such an announcement in the foyer as I saw at Westminster Abbey, I would be surprised. But I would also be pleased, very pleased.

I would appreciate attending such a gathering. I would like to sit with our sisters and brothers from the Christian Church and from the several divisions of the Church of Christ, along with all other Christians who would like to pray for the unity of God's people on earth. No debating this time, not even any sermons or discussion. The prayers might be intermingled with songs of praise. We would come quietly and leave quietly. We would pray, just pray. This would of course include penitential and confessional prayers for our sins and the sins of our people for either creating or tolerating a divided church. Our conduct has been scandalous! It is imperative that we pray and ask God to forgive us for what we have done to His church.

I say all this in order to say that the first order of business should be to recognize that *the unity of the Church of Christ on earth will one day be a fact*. Unity will come, *but* ... We must believe that its coming can be hastened by our fervent prayers and dedicated effort.

My main reason for believing that unity will come is because our Lord prayed for it. Have you read the prayer in Phillips translation? "I am not praying only for these men but for all those who will believe in me through their message, that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, live in me and I live in you, I am asking that they may live in us, that the world may believe that you did send me."

Jesus was facing the cross when he prayed that prayer, a prayer that *believers* would be united, which is not necessarily a prayer for structural unity of churches. We don't know what might become of church structures, or how the Father might use them, but we can believe that Jesus' prayer will one day be answered, and that Christians will be united before a lost world. It will in fact be this that will win the world, when unbelievers see love and oneness in the lives of those that profess Christ.

We must agree with Peter Ainslee when he said: "The winning of this world to Christ is a big task...the biggest ever undertaken...It cannot be done by a divided church. There is no more idle talk than to talk of the divided church's winning this world."

Unity! So that the world will believe. That is the way Jesus put it. When he commissioned his apostles to bear the message to all creatures, he could not have possibly supposed that they could do it divided.

If we can hasten unity by our prayers and efforts, it is well that we be as practical as possible. Mere theorizing will not get us anywhere. I suggest that we all give consideration to the following:

1. *Pray unity.* Everyday we should join our Lord in praying for the unity of all believers. This will hone our hearts and minds to fulfill that prayer in our own lives each day.
2. *Think and talk unity.* We should do this in universal terms, for it defeats our purposes to dwell upon minutiae. All who love Jesus and seek to emulate his character have a great deal in common. Love, joy, peace should be our great themes. Don't think of a neighbor as a Baptist or a Roman Catholic, but as one with whom you have much in common *in the Lord*. Thinking this way helps to make it so. If you stress the things that divide, you will not hasten the answer to Jesus' prayer.
3. Think *catholic* – those universal truths that by their very nature unite, such as the grace of God.
4. *Realize that you don't have to be judge, for each stands to his own master.* This is the great truth that you have on your side, but one little utilized. Memorize Romans 14:4: "Who are you to judge another man's servant. It is before his own master that he stands or falls." I am to love and accept you, even when you are wrong, and leave the judging to the Lord. This will do more for the unity of the church than can be imagined.
5. *Grow within yourself a conscience on the unity of the church.* Don't allow yourself to be "at ease in Zion" on the subject. Be burdened. Look for ways in which you can be a "unity movement" in your own life. There is someone that you can reach out to that no one else may be able to reach, remembering that it is love that binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:14).
6. *Think of the church as one, for it really is.* Though it is not realized, unity is nonetheless real in that it is the very nature of the church to be one. That is the meaning of the greatest non-Biblical quotation in our heritage: *The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.* Thomas Campbell was not saying it should be one or someday will be one, but is one. It cannot be the

church without being one. But still it is wracked with schism, and since this is contrary to the nature of the Body of Christ we must do all we can to rid the church of the blight of partyism.

7. *Be big-minded.* Magnanimity is a Christian virtue. We must be too large-souled to allow trifles to keep us separated from each other. Think of the great soul of Jesus: he always had time for anybody, whether slaves, lepers, prostitutes, the dispossessed. He was slow to draw lines, whether race, religion, or sex. No one was reluctant to approach him. He did not come to judge but to liberate. Let's be like Jesus and be magnanimous rather than like the Pharisees who had to be right about everything. It is the big person that can allow someone else to be different from herself. We can do much for peace and unity by resolving to make ourselves over rather than the other person. Philip. 4;5 is one of the great unity passages: *Let your moderation (gentleness) be known to all men.*

Remember that we are not divided over doctrines and practices as much as over attitudes. Partyism is a disease of the heart.

(*Restoration Review*: Vol. 23, No. 8; Oct. 1981)

Chapter 49

## If not Brotherhood, Then Co-Existence

*Leroy Garrett*

Ralph Bunche, our deputy ambassador to the United Nations, made an observation about brotherhood recently that merits our study. In an interview in *Psychology Today*, the famed Negro commented: "We can save the world with a lot less than brotherhood. With coexistence! I used to make speeches about brotherhood, but I never mention it anymore. Brotherhood is a misused, misleading term. What we need in this world is not brotherhood but coexistence. We need the right of every person to his own dignity. We need mutual respect."

In speaking *against* brotherhood in this way, Mr. Bunche is revealing that he has a very high regard for its meaning. He implies that brotherhood is *more* than dignified treatment and mutual respect, for he is willing to settle for these values, which he equates with coexistence.

It is to suggest that brotherhood among men is too much to expect, at least for now, and that we would do well to settle for a more realistic goal.

As one views the tragic divisions among God's people, especially the Restoration brotherhood, he sees wisdom in Bunche's analysis. We ourselves are so far from real brotherhood that we too might do well to settle for coexistence, at least for the present. Since we are so slow in learning how to treat some of God's children *brotherly*, we might try first learning how to refrain from treating them *unbrotherly*. If I cannot love a man, perhaps I can at least avoid hating him. If I cannot help him, I can at least refrain from hurting him.

Most of us have been guilty of giving lip service to brotherhood while treating sons of the Father more like aliens than brothers. We must get away from an institutional view of brotherhood and see men as brothers because they are sons of our heavenly Father. Let him be "a member of the family" rather than "belonging to the church." The boys' school that issues a picture with a lad carrying another and saying, "Father, he ain't heavy; he's my brother!" may get closer to the meaning of brotherhood than does our behavior in the Church of Christ. The splendor of brotherhood shines through to us when we view it in terms of the family. How do we receive and treat our brothers and sisters who are the children of our own parents?

I am not suspicious of them, but trust them. Even when they do things I do not like, I put the best interpretation possible on what they say and do. I extend to them the benefit of every doubt. I enjoy being with them. I rejoice over their good fortunes and am saddened by their losses. I am ready and eager to help when they are in trouble. I hope for them fullness of life and eternal peace with God, even when they annoy me with their skepticism. When they err, I seek to protect them from loss or embarrassment. I would not think of abusing them or advertising their weaknesses. When we are together as a family, I am gratified, but we are all conscious of the absent brother or sister. "All of us are here" is a blessing we seldom give voice to as the years of our lives multiply. That the family circle of eight children remains unbroken by death is a recognized blessing. We sometime wonder who will be the first to go, a painful anticipation.

This description would be typical of so many families across the land, and this is brotherhood. Should it be less vital and precious in the family of God?

On the desk beside me is a journal from the “conservative” wing of our brotherhood. In it are no less than two extended articles about a brother who was of its persuasion, but who has now “departed from the faith.” As one reads these two writers, both of whom refer to the offending member as a brother, he can hardly get the impression that they love the man as they would a member of their own family. They are resentful of what he has said and done. They challenge him to debate and castigate him for refusing to accept. He is referred to negatively again and again, even with his name emblazoned in the title of the articles. One gets the impression that they are after him. They are after their brother.

### **A Changed Attitude**

God knows, and some of you know, that I too have been guilty of this. It pains me to thumb through some of my earlier writings and remind myself of how I “cleaned the plow” of men I should have been treating as brothers. For months I rode a fellow editor as “Brother Hit and Run” because he would attack me in his paper and give me no chance to reply. Another I teased because he was once a mere sign painter and now a highly paid minister. I nettled others as “whistling in the dark” and billed Guy N. Woods, whom I twice debated, as Guyin Woods. I even “wrote ‘em up” when they put me in jail! And through the years I wouldn’t let them forget what they had done!

I would not have responded to my brothers in the flesh in these ways, and I was wrong in showing bitterness and resentment. I should have responded with “the sweet reasonableness of Christ.” But those are among the sins of yesteryear. Now I long to treat every man as one for whom Christ died, and those who are Christ’s I desire to treat with special tenderness. God forgive me when I fail to do this!

We must learn to appreciate more deeply what it means to be brothers. The poet Edwin Markham says it in a single line: “The crest and crowning of all good, life’s final star, is Brotherhood.” Paul surely understood the meaning of brotherhood or he could never have written: “If food is a cause of my brother’s falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall” (1 Cor. 8:13). The apostle speaks tenderly of “the brother for whom Christ died.” Oh, if we could but see each other in this light!

If Paul could forego meat, something completely within his right, in order to relieve a brother’s conscience, we can surely refrain from that stare, avoidance, sarcasm, indifference, or a write up that wounds a brother. It is sobering to realize that the way we treat a brother is indeed the way we are treating Christ. This caused Paul to write: “Sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”

It appears, however, that this kind of brotherliness has thus far eluded us or we have eluded it. So we might let the first step be coexistence, which would be, as defined by Ralph Bunche, a great improvement over our present behavior.

A visitor in a Texas city was asking the secretary of the largest Church of Christ about the other congregations in the area. When she named those that were on the approved list, the visitor

inquired about two others, one premillennial and the other nonSunday School. Her answer was “We are not in fellowship with those churches.”

A Texas church selected a Louisiana town in which to do mission work, for “the gospel has never been preached there,” wholly ignoring a premillennial congregation that had been there for 50 years. Once on the scene the missionary from Texas acted as if the premill brethren did not exist.

It is common practice among us for churches in a city to erect a sign on the highway inviting people to visit “The Churches of Christ of —.” Almost without exception there are other Churches of Christ that are not listed and who were not even consulted. It is as if they did not exist.

Our papers carry news items of Christian Church ministers who have been “converted to the truth,” or they have “accepted New Testament Christianity.” The editors in the Christian Church are kind enough not to do us that way when our men go to them, as they often have.

Brethren who move to a new location just happen sometime to identify themselves with a premill congregation and are happily situated, not noticing or not caring that they are premillennial. Such ones are soon called on by “loyal” brethren and warned of their evil association.

These illustrations, which are by no means atypical, show that we do not even coexist with those who are “brothers for whom Christ died.” If we cannot bless, we can at least not curse; if we cannot accept, we can at least not reject. A Hindu proverb reads: “Help thy brother’s boat across, and lo! thine own has reached the shore.” We have not yet learned to refrain from puncturing holes in our brother’s boat.

Coexistence may not allow for the likes of pulpit exchanges, cooperative efforts, or even mutual visitation. But it will mean an admission of existence, a kind of live and let live relationship. It may not be like sending a dove of peace, but it will be calling off the dogs.

But brotherhood itself is the end in view. The call for a policy of coexistence is the stage setting for something still higher. Once we begin to coexist we will trail out toward real brotherhood. Respect and tolerance will give way to brotherly affection.

Thomas V. Smith expresses my sentiments:

“Brotherhood is in essence, a hope on the road – the long road – to fulfillment. To claim it to be already a full grown fact is to be guilty of hypocrisy. To admit it to be always a fiction is to be guilty of cynicism. Let us avoid both.”

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 11, No. 4; April 1969)*

Chapter 50

# This is Our Glory!

*Leroy Garrett*

It was amidst fear, defeat and death that a child in the Old Testament scriptures, a grandson to tragic Eli, was named Ichabod, meaning “without glory.” A battle with the Philistines had not only left Israel defeated, but had resulted in the death of Eli’s wayward sons and the capture of the ark of the Covenant. Aged Eli had himself fallen over dead upon hearing the sad news, and his daughter-in-law, giving birth to a son at that hour, saw Ichabod as the only appropriate name for the child, saying as she did, “Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

Since it is such a magnificent concept, *glory* defies any simple definition. But one aspect of it is the presence of God in the human situation, as in Exo. 40:35: “The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle,” and 1 Chron. 16:24: “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” In 1 Cor. 11:7 man is esteemed as “the image and glory of God,” indicating that God is in some way part and parcel of human nature.

Jesus makes reference to the glory of God in his prayer for the oneness of all his disciples, first for the apostles and then for all who believe because of their word, which of course includes all of us. “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are one,” prayed our Lord.

His prayer had already pointed to the *end* of unity: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. This shows that unity is more far reaching than the joy and fellowship it makes possible among the saints. Its ultimate purpose is to be a testimony that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Lord of glory. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). It is not by being baptized or by faithfully attending services that the world will be impressed, nor by being right or doctrinally sound. It is rather the magnificent Christian dynamic of love that will press the claims of Jesus upon men’s conscience. That woeful cry, “How these miserable creatures love one another!” has come ringing through the centuries from Rome’s amphitheatre as a testimonial of the difference Jesus makes when he resides in the human heart through the indwelling Guest of heaven. This is the glory of unity, and that unity witnesses to the love of Jesus in our hearts, and it is this that impresses an otherwise obdurate world.

Such is the purpose of unity and the fellowship of saints in the community of God. Then in the reference to glory the Lord gives us the *source* or *means* of unity. He gives us his glory that we may be one.

The glory he gives us is his own presence in our hearts. Our Lord was one with the Father because of the glory that God gave him, John 17:22 indicates. We in turn enjoy oneness by the glory that Jesus gives us, which is the glory the Father gave him. So as God filled Jesus with his own presence, Jesus in turn fills us with his own presence. This is what makes unity possible.

The context makes it evident that Jesus is referring to the indwelling Holy Spirit when he promises us his glory. It is by way of the Spirit that the Christ dwells in the believer. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you," he promises the apostles in John 14:18, which is hardly a reference to his second coming. It points rather to the coming Spirit, who was to be both *with* and *in* them, and through whom Jesus would himself be present.

This is the point of that "funeral text" in John 14, which happens to be more appropriate for a lesson on what the Holy Spirit does for the believer than for a funeral. The reason the disciples were not to let their hearts be troubled was that in each of their hearts God had a dwelling place, for in God's house there are as many abodes for his presence as there are children. The "place" that Jesus has prepared for us is not an apartment in heaven, but a communion with himself here in this world through the visitation of the Spirit of God, which his departure in the flesh would make possible.

He puts the same promise in the context of the coming Spirit in verses 25-28 of the same chapter. Verse 26 refers to the Spirit's coming at Jesus' departure. Verse 27 makes promise of the peace that only Jesus can give, and then says, "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Then in verse 28 he repeats his promise that even though he is going away he will come again, not leaving them as orphans.

All this shows that he frees us of trouble, worry and fear by being with us (and who can be troubled with Jesus around?) and giving us his peace. And this by way of the Holy Spirit within us. This is our glory, his presence within us, and it is this that makes us one. This is why unity is the Spirit's unity and not our own. Unity must find its source in Jesus just as glory emanates from him into our lives.

Is then our name Ichabod since we are a divided people? So long as we perpetuate our parties, showing indifference to the scriptural mandate for oneness, just that long we are without glory. A movement that began as a serious effort to unite the Christians has since become the most divisive in the Christian world. It is to our shame if this does not concern us. Our name is Ichabod so long as we are content to remain a divided people.

Thank God for the many among us who wish for the Church of Christ that it be "a glorious church, having neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing," as the Spirit urges. Such ones are refusing to follow party lines, but instead are allowing the fellowship of the Spirit to introduce them to brothers that they never realized they had. They are reaching out beyond sectarian barriers to claim all those as brothers whom God accepts as sons. It is this that removes the spots and wrinkles of division and strife.

God's glory will fill the church as it fills each of us who are resolved to "preserve the Spirit's unity in the bonds of peace." Let God reform his church and fill it with his Spirit by beginning with me. When partyism ends in my own heart an important victory is scored by the indwelling Spirit.

That the Spirit will in the end be victorious is surely certain. God's glory will fill the Body of Christ upon earth, with the communion of the saints cutting across all lines, whether racial, cultural or sectarian. It is only a question of what role we in the Church of Christ will play, what contribution we will make.

I do not wish to be part of an Ichabod Church of Christ, but such has to be the name of any people who are content to remain divided a dozen different ways. Once we allow our petty sectarian ways to be swallowed up in the Body of Christ at large, we will be a glorious church, filled with his Spirit, and rejoicing in the oneness of all God's children.

*(Restoration Review: Vol. 14, No. 8; Oct. 1972; Book: The Restoration Mind)*

## Chapter 51

# The Unifying Power of the Cross

*Leroy Garrett*

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.* John 12:42

It takes power beyond the best of human effort to unite that which is divided. Unity forums are to be encouraged but these alone lack the power to unite. Creeds, whether written or unwritten, when subscribed to by all parties involved, may produce a superficial uniformity, but hardly the unity for which our Lord prayed. Even baptism, the powerful symbol that it is of union with Christ, has not the power within itself to unite believers, for people may see baptism alike and be baptized alike and still not be one. And however much doctrinal agreement may be prized it is hardly the bond of oneness, for two people (or an entire congregation) may see everything alike and still not be one in Christ.

We all know that people can sit side by side, pews full of them, and sing the same hymns, pray the same prayers, and read the same Scriptures and still be void of unifying power. Just as men may spend years together in the same prison cell and never become brothers, church folk can be locked into the same liturgical routine for a lifetime and never experience the power of unity in Christ.

We often point to the Bible as the basis of unity, but even the Bible makes no such claim for itself. No book has the power to meld estranged hearts into one, not even a book that comes from God. God did not give a collection of documents to heal broken hearts, but a Person. It is the wonderful Person of the Bible that makes wholeness possible, not the Bible itself, however much unanimity there may be in the study of it. If a book could have reconciled men to God and to each other, then the God of heaven could have looked to the printing press rather than the Cross. If we could have been saved (and made sisters and brothers) by the law or by a book, then Christ died for naught.

If unity is a matter of seeing the Bible eye-to-eye, then believers will never be united, for they never have and never will see the Bible alike. And if believers ever have been united, such as in the early centuries (and other times as well) when they died together for their faith, it was not because of doctrinal agreement upon the Bible but because of their common devotion to Jesus Christ.

Lest we forget that the earliest church, which we may think of as united amidst substantial diversity, had no New Testament Scriptures upon which to unite. If the little band of saints in Philippi were of “the same mind in the Lord,” as the apostle’s letter to them would indicate, it was not because they had read the New Testament and agreed upon its contents, for the writing that make up that portion of the Bible were not yet determined and some were not yet written. So, it was something else (or Someone else) beside doctrinal conformity to a book that united them, and so, when Paul wrote to them he could refer not only to the fellowship of the Spirit but also to their abundant joy in Jesus Christ.

If you have the joy of the Lord in your heart and I have it in my heart, we are going to be one, in spite of our differences. In that little Philippian letter Paul names the basis of unity, even when

referring to brethren with whom he had serious differences: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, *Christ is preached*; and in this I rejoice, and will rejoice” (Philip. 1:19). Christ is preached! Any other basis of unity is heresy, for only the Cross has the power to unite that which is divided.

It takes nothing from the importance of the Bible to acknowledge that it never has been and never can be the basis of Christian unity. The Bible as the word of God strengthens and enriches the unity and fellowship that is found only in Christ. It is enough to allow the Bible itself to describe its function: “All Scripture inspired of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Devotion and loyalty to Jesus Christ is the basis and source of our oneness in the faith, while the Scriptures are given to “build us up” as the family of God on earth, as Acts 20:32 shows. Children are a great blessing to a marriage, but not the basis of the marriage. A marriage must find its oneness in the mutual love of the man and wife. Children do not produce the marriage but the marriage the children. So with the Scriptures. The Bible did not produce the church but the church the Bible. Unity in Christ came first, and out of that united witness came the Scriptures.

The apostle John serves as interpreter of what Jesus meant when he declared, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” in John 12:32. One might conclude that Jesus was referring to his ascension, but John tells us in the following verse that Jesus was alluding to “what death He would die.” It is remarkable that Jesus would refer to the Cross. The use of “If I be lifted up” really means “When I be lifted up,” for there was no question in his mind but that he would go to the Cross. When that happens, he was saying, the drawing power of unity will be a reality.

### **Together At The Cross**

When you are drawn to that Cross and I am drawn to that Cross, we are together, in spite of all our faults and warts and diversities. If we are separated by factions, parties and divisions, we don’t have to wait until everything is resolved and every point settled, for that will never happen. And we don’t have to concentrate on trying to get closer to each other, such as whooping it up at a unity conference. The means, the source, the power is already available. We only need to move within the shadow of the Cross. All who do that will experience the unifying power of the Cross.

However much people may be separated, whether by race, sex, class, or creed, they can find unifying power in the Cross. Each step we take toward the Cross puts us one step closer to each other. Once we stand at the Cross together with empty cups to be filled by His grace, our differences will not be as important to us as when we stand at shouting distance from each other. But some differences are important and need to be dealt with. Let them be dealt with within the shadow of the Cross and in the spirit of that love that prayed “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!”

That is the only unity there can be. In that unity of love and acceptance of each other as equals, and not as “erring brothers,” we can discuss our differences – like Paul and Peter did, *within* the unity and fellowship of Christ. Fellowship at the Cross must come first, then discussion of differences. Not the other way around. If we allow the Cross to wait until we iron out all the problems, we will never make it to the Cross. The power to unite is not in doctrinal unanimity but in the Cross.

This is why the apostle Paul addressed a church riddled with factions, not in terms of doctrinal conformity, but in terms of the power of the Cross: “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). In the same context Paul refers to “the message of the Cross” as the power of God (1:18), which is the power to unite as well as the power to save. If we would but be like the great apostle by making the Cross our message rather than our sectarian peculiarities, we would discover the power to overcome our superficiality.

In meeting each other at the Cross we not only find power but also joy. Our Lord endured the Cross and ignored its shame “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2). He rejoiced in the face of the Cross not only because it marked the end of his earthly ordeal and that he would be returning to the Father, but also because in the Cross the Father’s purpose for the unity of all mankind could be realized. In Eph. 1:10 that purpose is described as “that He might gather together in one all things in Christ,” and that includes “all things in heaven and upon earth.” That seems to include all of nature, all the animal kingdom, all the universe, as well as all mankind. So, there is great significance in Christ’s assurance that “When I am lifted up I will draw all peoples to Myself.” His mission was to unite all things in heaven and on earth, and this pointed to the unifying power of the Cross.

We are a people who have always been concerned, and perhaps rightly so, as to where to draw the line in terms of unity and fellowship. There is obviously a place to draw the line since everyone is not a Christian, but we are reluctant to draw the line except where Christ drew it, at the Cross. He accepts all who come to the Cross. Should we require more? In John 3:14 he likened his being lifted up on the Cross to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. In Moses’ time the people were healed when they looked upon the serpent. They did have to look in simple trusting faith.

And so we today must look to the Cross for our healing. When people do that we should meet them there in loving acceptance, for they have yielded themselves in humble obedience to Christ. That is unity and fellowship. If they are deficient in some ways (and who is not?) there will be time enough, in an atmosphere of loving forbearance, to show them the way of the Lord more perfectly. They in turn will help us to see and do the way of the Lord more perfectly.

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