

“CHRIST IN YOU”

THE GOAL OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT (1)

Church of Christ / 9301 Sheldon Road

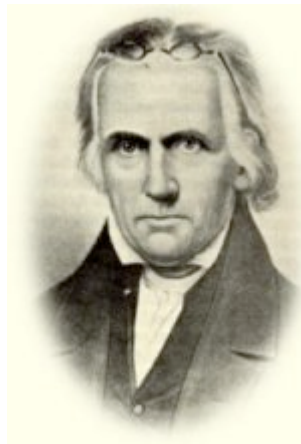
Plymouth, Michigan 48170

Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 03.21.2004

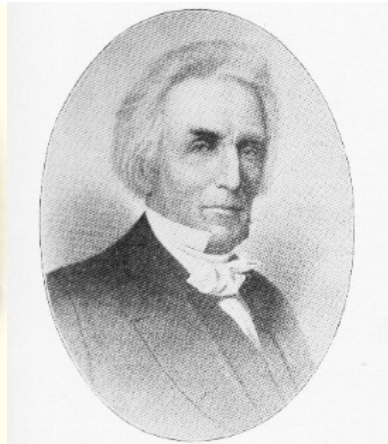
Good morning! I am delighted that you are here today. On this “Friend and Family Sunday,” we—the members of the Plymouth Church of Christ—welcome all of you who have chosen to worship with us today. We thank you for taking the time and making the effort to enrich our worship experience on this Sunday morning.

The Churches of Christ: Who are we? Where did we come from? What do we believe? It is impossible to fully understand the Churches of Christ in America apart from our commitment to the restoration of New Testament Christianity. Like most, if not all, religious communities we owe a spiritual debt to the past, to men and women of faith on whose shoulders we stand today.

Go with me, please, to the early 19th century, to a devout Presbyterian minister—Thomas Campbell—and his scholarly son—Alexander Campbell—separately, they both came to America. They were disenchanted with the sectarian spirit that choked their church, and they determined by God’s grace to do better. America became their promised land.



Thomas Campbell



Alexander Campbell

The Campbells, along with those who united with them, made a significant and lasting contribution to American Christianity; but they were by no means alone. More

than a dozen such “restoration movements” began during these same years in America, and churches born of such movements are scattered throughout our land today. Although each restoration movement usually considers itself unique, if worshippers will investigate one another they will discover that a number of their “distinctive” beliefs and practices are, in fact, not distinctive at all. The heirs of these restoration movements have more in common than they are often willing to admit.

Back on the American frontier in the early 19th century, God had indeed prepared the hearts of women and men for the many restoration movements. A spirit of enthusiasm and expectancy prevailed throughout the land. Health movements sprang up, back-to-nature advocates flourished, and there were social utopian dreamers and planners of communes. Alexander Campbell named his major journal *The Millennial Harbinger*, and he published it for nearly forty years. The same atmosphere of enthusiasm and expectancy breathed life into America’s own prophetic movements, three of which grew up to become the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons).

Spiritual revival swept the land, wielding an influence so great it is remembered as the Second Great Awakening. When historians write of that revival, they almost always speak of Cane Ridge, Kentucky. There the magnetism of fervent preaching drew people from many walks of life. With the conviction of sin came some rather strange physical demonstrations. Men and women jumped and jerked, “barked,” shouted, and fell to the ground.



Cane Ridge Meeting House
Famous Revival 1801

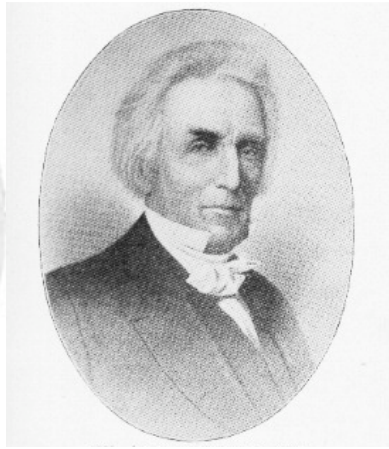


Barton W. Stone
Preaching at Cane Ridge

The primary preacher at Cane Ridge was a young Presbyterian minister named Barton Warren Stone. Charged with evangelistic fervor, Stone denounced denominational divisions and called for a return to primitive Christianity. He taught his converts to call themselves simply “Christians.” Alexander Campbell, armed with an outstanding intellect, was pursuing similar goals, identifying his people as “disciples of Christ.” Later, the two—Campbell and Stone—joined forces, bringing together Stone’s passion for religious revival and Campbell’s passion for rational reform.



Barton W. Stone



Alexander Campbell

Today, three groups of churches stand as descendants of the work of these men: the Disciples of Christ, the independent Christian Churches, and the Churches of Christ. The Christian Churches and the Churches of Christ are alike in many ways, and the name “Churches of Christ” is often used by both religious bodies.

What, then, is this Restoration Movement of which the Churches of Christ are descendants? *First, this Restoration Movement in America has been a search for spiritual freedom in Christ.* Not surprisingly, it began in the same revolutionary period during which our country was born. Some restoration leaders were involved in the colonists' struggle for independence. James O'Kelly was a friend of Thomas Jefferson and is said to have preached to the Continental Congress while the Revolutionary War was in progress. O'Kelly was arrested by British forces, but after his release he enlisted in General Washington's army and fought in a number of campaigns. A cousin of Barton W. Stone was a Maryland signer of the Declaration of Independence. But the debt we owe to these early restoration leaders is spiritual, not simply political, for they were longing to be free men in Jesus Christ. They wanted to be free to follow the Bible as their only guide. The major denominations on the American frontier had their creeds, and the creeds were the final standard for determining who could be a member of the denomination and who could be ordained into the ministry. The authority of the Confession of Faith was, in nearly every case, an issue that led the early restoration leaders to depart from their denominations.

The spiritual freedom to follow Christ, to obey only His word, and to be Christians only is one of the great themes of the New Testament. Jesus declared, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). He added, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). The Apostle Paul wrote, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). However, Paul added this warning, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (Gal 5:13). The Restoration Movement has been, and continues to be, a search for spiritual freedom in Jesus Christ.

Second, this Restoration Movement is a conviction that we can be Christ's church today. The promise of Jesus—"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it" (Matt 16:18)—that promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in the opening chapters of the Book of Acts. On that day, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, the gospel was preached, the believers were instructed to "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins," and the church was

born with three thousand souls added to it. But we must face the question, “Is it possible for believers in the 21st century to be members of that same church which began in the first century?” Our answer is “Yes.” The Restoration Movement has been, and continues to be, a conviction that we can be Christ’s church today.

Third, this Restoration Movement is a worldwide fellowship of Christians. Too often, our vision of the church may be too narrow, too limited, too small. On the Day of Pentecost to which we have referred, the Apostle Peter set forth the nature of the church. He proclaimed, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). The call of God extends beyond our buildings and beyond our children, to everyone and to anyone who will hear His call. The Restoration Movement has been, and continues to be, a worldwide fellowship of Christians.

In chapter ten of the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul penned these words:

Christ is the culmination [He is the goal] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Rom 10:4).

Borrowing Paul’s language, we can express the essence of the Restoration Movement this way:

Christ is the culmination [He is the goal] of the Restoration Movement so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes in Christ.

Jesus Christ must be the focus of our faith. Any restoration movement that claims to have its roots in Scripture, must be a movement of women and men into the image of Christ. Christ must be the goal of any and all such restoration movements. If the goal of restoration is the *church*, we will emphasize the *institution* rather than the *individual*—Christianity will become an “organized religion” rather than a way of life. If the goal of restoration is *doctrine*, we will emphasize *what* we believe rather than in *whom* we believe—Christianity will become disputes about dogma rather than devotion to a crucified Christ. If the goal of restoration is *tradition*, we will emphasize *how* we practice faith rather than *why* we practice faith—Christianity will become external rituals rather than internal righteousness. And if the goal of restoration is *human emotion*, we will emphasize *feelings* rather than *facts*—Christianity will become a subjective inner light rather than a shining outer light. Jesus Christ must be the focus of our faith, so that the movement that takes place in restoration is the movement of Christ into our lives,

thereby changing you and changing me into the likeness of Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul spoke of “Christ in us.”

Gal 2:20 — I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, *but Christ lives in me*. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 4:19 — My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth *until Christ is formed in you . . .*

In 2:20, Paul spoke of Christ living in the Christian. In 4:19, the “you” is plural, and so Paul spoke of Christ living in His church. Christ in you; Christ in me; Christ in all of us—that is what the Restoration Movement has been, and still is, all about. (Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will continue to explore the Restoration Movement, highlighting what it means for those who claim to be a part of it.)

To all of you who visited with us today, we thank you. We hope that you see Christ in us, and we pray that Christ will be in you.

C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (ACU Press, 1988).

Royce Dickinson, Jr., “The Centrality of the Cross: The Message of Galatians,” *Integrity* 31(Fall 2000): 25-30.

Everett Ferguson, “The Validity of the Restoration Principle,” *Mission* 7 (August 1973): 5-10.

Harold W. Ford, *A History of the Restoration Plea* (College Press, 1952).

Edward Fudge, *The Restoration Movement Fulfilled in Jesus Christ* (Pamphlet: Mike Randall Bruce, 1981).

Monroe Hawley, *The Focus of Our Faith: A New Look at the Restoration Principle* (20th Century Christian, 1985).

Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Eerdmans, 1996).

B. J. Humble, “What Is the Restoration Movement?” *Restoration Quarterly* 22 (First & Second Quarters 1979): 12-18.

New Wineskins 6.1 (March/April 2002). Theme of issue is “Jesus: Our Only Benchmark.”

Richard Oster, “Missing the Goal of Restoration,” *Gospel Advocate* 129 (May 21, 1987): 296, 308.

Bruce Terry, “What Makes a Congregation a Church of Christ,” *Firm Foundation* 99 (May 18, 1982): 3.

Marty Wooten, *Christ in You: Principles of New Testament Restoration* (Pamphlet: Crossroads Publications, 1986).