

“CHRIST IN YOU”

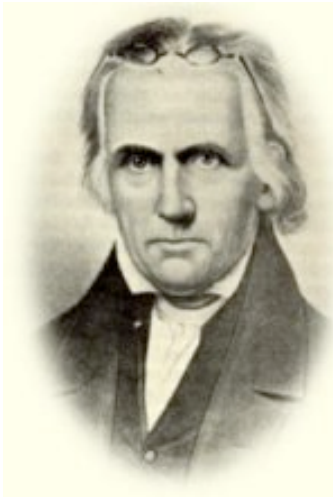
THE GOAL OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT (2)

Church of Christ / 9301 Sheldon Road

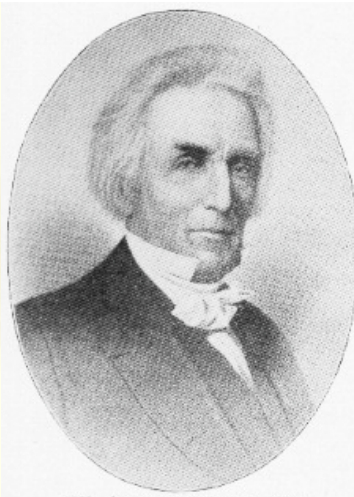
Plymouth, Michigan 48170

Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 03.28.2004

What a wonderful Sunday today is! Last Sunday, we had an attendance of 316 at “Friend and Family Sunday.” I want to thank so many of you who played a part in the success of “Friend and Family Sunday.” Thank you! Next Sunday, we will officially kick-off our building renovation. Finally, after years of hope and hard work, work on the building will begin. Please be prepared to be inconvenienced. Yes, this will be a time of great excitement, but it will also be a time for great patience. The road that lies ahead looks like a typical Michigan road, and so, at times, the ride will be rough. Just remember the construction signs that read: “Short-term delays for long-term relief.” With God’s help, it will be worth it all when it is done.



Thomas Campbell



Alexander Campbell



Barton W. Stone

Last week we began a study that we will conclude this week. We raised these questions about the Churches of Christ: Who are we? Where did we come from? What do we believe? We learned that it is impossible to fully understand the Churches of Christ in America apart from our commitment to the restoration of New Testament Christianity. Against the backdrop of a history that highlights men such as Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Barton W. Stone, we saw that on the American

frontier in the early 19th century, God had prepared the hearts of women and men for the many restoration movements that took place. A spirit of enthusiasm and expectancy prevailed throughout the land. Spiritual revival swept the land, wielding an influence so great it is remembered as the Second Great Awakening.

Concerning the Restoration Movement of which the Churches of Christ are descendants, we made three observations. *First, this Restoration Movement in America has been, and continues to be, a search for spiritual freedom in Christ.* 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. *Second, this Restoration Movement is a conviction that we can be Christ's church today.* 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." *Third, this Restoration Movement is a worldwide fellowship of Christians.* The call of God extends beyond our buildings and beyond our children, to everyone and to anyone who will hear His call.

Although we, the Churches of Christ, like to say that the New Testament church was established on Pentecost in A.D. 33, and then to say that is all we are, we simply cannot erase almost 2000 years of history as if it never happened. What is *known* today as the "Churches of Christ" had a historical beginning in 19th-century America. That is historical fact. In the spirit of preserving what is good concerning our heritage, I would like to offer four suggestions.

Number One: *We should use "restoration" as a tool rather than understanding it as the goal.* Restoration is a means to an end, not the end itself. For our Restoration forefathers, the ultimate goal was the restoration of men and women to fellowship with God. Restoration, therefore, involved more than just forms, institutions, and externals. These things had their place, and in their place were important, but they served a greater need: men and women must be redeemed; they must be brought into a right relationship with God; they must mature spiritually for eternal fellowship with God. Unless these things were achieved, all else was in vain. The purpose for restoration was to evangelize the world.

In the first chapter of Acts, when Jesus' apostles became too preoccupied about the details of the restoration of Israel (vv. 6-8), Jesus was quick to respond with a directive

about worldwide evangelism. Jesus' response was natural because being a light to the nations was and is the prime directive to God's chosen people. Along with the emphasis upon teaching those who already were believers (18:24-19:7), the bulk of Acts focuses on the apostles as lights and witnesses to the unbelieving regions of the Roman world. When we see restoration as a tool rather than as a goal, we will recognize the difference between having a view of evangelism that seeks primarily other believers and seeks to settle fellowship questions, and a view of evangelism that takes seriously the mandate to be a light to the nations.

As a Church of Christ, if our mission, methods, and ministries are not increasing the population of Heaven, then everything and anything that we are doing is in vain.

Number Two: *We should cherish the ideal of a pure church without making it an idol that competes with Jesus.* Surely no one can quarrel with the desire for a pure church, especially if it is sought after with love and humility. Yet, the quest for a pure church has too often been lacking in love and humility, being motivated instead by selfish ambition and pride. More than once, the pursuit of a pure church has been the excuse for mistreating people for whom Christ died. Even worse, some have turned the ideal of a pure church into the basis for their confidence before God. Believing themselves to be the pure church, they have become self-righteous and spiritually arrogant. The Apostle Paul declared: "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). There is the temptation and the tendency for any restoration movement to do the very thing Paul renounces; and that is, to preach the church (to preach ourselves) rather than to preach Jesus Christ. 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. After all, the church did not create Christ; Christ created the church.

Number Three: *We should appreciate our historical heritage without losing our perspective.* We should realize that we, like all other religious groups, are a part of history. Our movement did not fall out of the clear blue sky, nor did it miraculously time warp from the Day of Pentecost to 19th-century America. We have roots and ancestors, just as all movements among people do. We should give thanks for every insight our forefathers gained from Scripture. But we dare not stop studying Scripture for ourselves,

and we dare not assume that our forefathers were right in all their teachings.

Number Four: *We should remember that the church is not ours but is Christ's.* I want to ask a favor of everyone here this morning. When you leave this building today by driving out of the parking lot and on to Sheldon Road, please take a look to your right at the sign in the front yard. Whose name is on the sign? Church of *whom*? Whose church is it? I submit to you that Jesus Christ is building His church from women and men who are drawn to the cross and to one another by the Holy Spirit as the Gospel is preached throughout the world. It was Jesus who said, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it" (Matt 16:18). Mere mortals can never build *that* church, destroy it, restore it, or preserve it. What makes us Christ's church is the fact that Christ has saved us and is living in us. In the words of Paul, "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 2:20).

Published in 1809, the *Declaration and Address* by Thomas Campbell is considered by some to be the Magna Charta of the Restoration Movement, and it is generally accepted as one of the great classics of Christian literature. The main purpose of the Declaration was to emphasize the necessary and essential unity of the Church of Christ throughout the world and to show how this unity had become overshadowed by sectarian and denominational rivalries. According to Campbell, the solution for the situation is found in the simple principles laid down in the New Testament which all Christians at that time accepted. Furthermore, Campbell argued, the consensus of intelligent and consecrated Christian minds must be the final standard for Biblical interpretation.

I realize that Campbell's work is not Scripture, and I am not suggesting that it is equal to Scripture. However, I want to share with you the conclusion of Campbell's *Declaration and Address*. Outside of Scripture itself, I doubt that I have read any words more often than these.

Alas, poor people! how do our divisions and corruptions stand in your way!
What a pity that you find us not upon original ground, such as the apostles left the primitive Churches! Had we but exhibited to you their unity and charity; their humble, honest, and affectionate deportment toward each other and toward all men, you would not have had those evil and shameful things to object to our holy religion, and to prejudice your minds against it. But your conversion, it seems, awaits our reformation; awaits our return to primitive unity and love. To this may

the God of mercy speedily restore us, both for your sakes and our own, that *his way* may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Amen, and amen.

“But your conversion, it seems, awaits our reformation; awaits our return to primitive unity and love.” That statement is a statement that I am unable to get out of my mind.

How many souls will be lost because we are not the church we claim to be? How many?

Twice Jesus specified an identifying characteristic of His disciples:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35, NRSV).

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21, NRSV).

Love and unity for the sake of those who hear the Gospel and for our own sake—that is what the Restoration Movement is all about. It is about becoming God’s light to a world in darkness. May the Holy Spirit bind us together in love so that we may practice and proclaim the love of Jesus Christ to others. Amen.

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