

## **OUR ROOTS**

### **A Concise History of Churches of Christ**

#### **Lesson Two: Barton Stone, the Campbells, and Christian Unity**

Although there were groups of “Christians” in the south and in New England, the most numerous band grew out of the Presbyterian and Baptist churches in Kentucky and Tennessee. The leader of these “Christians of the West,” as they were called, was a man by the name of Barton W. Stone.

#### **STONE’S EARLY LIFE**

Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) was born in Maryland and raised as a nominal Episcopalian.

What is the doctrine of the Trinity?

What is the doctrine of predestination?

#### **THE CANE RIDGE REVIVAL**

“religious exercises”

The Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky and the Springfield Presbytery

The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery (1804)

#### **THE GROWTH OF THE STONE MOVEMENT**

At the suggestion of Rice Haggard, a former associate of James O’Kelly (lesson 1), Stone and his followers soon called themselves Christians and established congregations they called Churches of Christ or Christian Churches. By the 1820s the Stone movement has grown to 12,000 members and churches spread from Kentucky and Ohio to Tennessee, Alabama, Missouri, and Illinois.

## THE COMING OF THE CAMPBELLS

Thomas Campbell grew up in Ireland. His father, Archibald Campbell, was an Anglican converted from Roman Catholicism. Thomas converted to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, becoming a minister for the Ahorey Church in Rich Hill, Ireland.

The Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church

The Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania.

Thomas' son Alexander, along with the rest of the family set sail for America in 1808, but were shipwrecked off the coast of Scotland. Circumstances kept them in Glasgow for a year before they would be able to sail again.

The Brush Run church

The Redstone Baptist Association

The Mahoning Baptist Association

Now an independent movement, the churches led by Campbell faced the question of what to call themselves. Many preferred the name "Christian." Many congregations simply went by the name of the community, i.e., "the Brush Run Church" or the "Wellsburg Church." Sometimes a sign on the outside of the building read "Church of Christ" or "Christian Church." One name eventually prevailed, "Disciples of Christ." Alexander especially liked this name because Jesus' followers were called Disciples before they were called Christians. This would also keep them from being confused with other Christian movements including the one led by Stone.

## **"Last Will & Testament of the Springfield Presbytery"**

June 28, 1804

The Presbytery of Springfield sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following, viz.:

*Imprimis.* 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.

*Item.* We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.

*Item.* We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

*Item.* We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

*Item.* We will, that the church of Christ resume her native right of internal government,—try her candidates for the ministry, as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity and aptness to teach; and admit no other proof of their authority but Christ speaking in them.

We will, that the church of Christ look up to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest; and that she resume her primitive right of trying those who say they are apostles, and are not.

*Item.* We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit, choose her own preacher, and support him by a free-will offering, without a written call or subscription—admit members—remove offenses; and never henceforth delegate her right of government to any man or set of men whatever.

*Item.* We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

*Item.* We will, that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh.

*Item.* We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.

*Item.* We will, the Synod of Kentucky examine every member who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty.

*Item.* We will, that Ja-----, the author of two letters lately published in Lexington, be encouraged in his zeal to destroy partyism. We will, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not.

*Item.* Finally we will, that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

### **Signatories**

ROBERT MARSHALL & JOHN THOMPSON, both, soon "repented" and returned into Presbyterianism.

RICHARD M'NEMAR & JOHN DUNLAVY, both, soon became Shakers.

B. W. STONE (31 yrs) & DAVID PURVIANCE (37 yrs), alone, remained committed to these principles.

**The Declaration and Address**  
Written by Thomas Campbell in 1809

The original document can be found online, but one can get lost in the 19<sup>th</sup> century language. The main points include:

1. *A fervent call to Christian unity.* "That the Church of Christ on ear is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." It is one essence because Christians are "subjects of the same grace, objects of the same divine love, bought with the same price, and joint heirs of the same inheritance." God intends the church to be one, evidenced by Jesus' fervent prayer for unity in John 17. The "constitution" that makes the church one is the New Testament.
2. *A strong condemnation of division among Christians.* "That division among Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils." Thus, there should "be no schisms, no uncharitable division among them."
3. *Doctrinal differences not based on the express teaching of the New Testament are the causes of division.* More than sixty times in the *Declaration and Address*, Campbell uses phrases like "expressly exhibited," "plain," and "clear" to describe the binding teachings of Scripture. Where the Bible is unclear or silent, no disagreement should divide Christians. Thomas Campbell never spelled out exactly what those "express teachings" are. Neither does he address the difficulty of Christians strongly disagreeing over what the Bible "expressly" teaches. This would be a significant problem later in the Campbell movement.
4. *A simple confession of faith in Jesus, not agreement with an elaborate creed, is all that is necessary for admission to the church.* Thus, creeds, even if true and helpful, should not be used to exclude Christians who disagree with them from full acceptance as children of God.
5. *A desire to return to the purity of the first century church.* By removing items that have divided Christians and obscured the beauty of the church, God's people can experience personal and corporate holiness and purity.
6. *An appeal for love and understanding among Christians.* Those who confess faith in Christ "should consider each other as the precious saints of God, should love each other as brethren, children of the same family and father, temples of the same Spirit, members of the same body..."

Campbell never intended the principles in the *Declaration and Address* to be the basis of a new religious group; it was simply a call to unity among Christians of all denominations. Things changed when the Christian Association of Washington eventually formed the nucleus of a new congregation, the Brush Run Church. By forming a church, Campbell made his quest for Christian unity more difficult.