

BEING A RESTORATION CHURCH

Grimsby, Aug. 28/11

INTRO: There was a festive spirit of Christmas and New Years in the air in 1831 going into 1832! The country was at peace, it was expanding west and there was opportunity

for people of vision. But how could the two become joined as one? In this, our final lesson on BEING A RESTORATION CHURCH, I want to reemphasize the point that this didn't happen overnight and add that there were some large scale differences in order to overcome to unite the two groups that stood for restoration. Historically the Restoration Movement had crystalized into two main wings- not warring faction, just two leading personalities and their emphases. This has become know to us in history as the STONE/CAMPBELL MOVEMENT.

Aware of our Lord's prayer for unity the two groups met for months to pray fervently and to discuss daily the two groups might be one.

1. They Knew Unity Built Upon Uniformity Was Impossible

1832: The Differences between the Reformers/Disciples and the Christians

http://www.aliensphere.com/one/pmeetings/1832_differences_article.htm

The differences between the two (2) groups were theologically substantial and there were those on both sides (the Naysayers) who considered them to be insurmountable. If Unity were to be built on Uniformity, then by no stretch of the imagination were they even close and by today's standards probably wouldn't be found in the same room together. But there was the one principle they all accepted, and it was this foundational Christian principle that would eventually make them one people; they were all of one faith and one baptism.

Still, there was by no means conformity of viewpoint in either doctrine or practice. The following seven (7) differences then and in today's theological circles would still be considered substantial:

EVANGELISM - The most notable difference was in evangelism, both in theory and practice:

Barton Stone's Christians were zealous and emotional, even to the point of using the mourner's bench, which was then common. The Christians had numerous, trained, well educated, ordained evangelists who promulgated this practice.

Alexander Campbell's Disciples did not have a single itinerant preacher in the field at the end of 1831. The Disciples were far more rational and subdued in their approach and the thought of a "mourner's bench" really turned them off.

INCONSISTENCY ON BAPTISM – While they were both immersionists:

Barton Stone's Christians did not emphasize it like the Disciples did. The Christians believed that one could be saved without baptism and it was not necessary to Christian communion. Like Campbell, Stone taught that baptism was for the remission of sins, but he did not press the point and admitted to an inconsistency in its application.

Thomas Campbell, even though he acquiesced to immersion in 1812, and preached for seven (7) straight hours at his own immersion service, never did repudiate his Calvinistic view on infant baptism and took issue with his son on the need to "Re-Christianize the Christian world" through baptism by immersion. Can you imagine that poor Baptist preacher, Mathias Luce who baptized the entire Campbell Clan, listening to a 7 hour sermon on baptism from Campbell himself?? No wonder the Baptist have always had it in for us!!

ORDAINED MINISTRY

Barton Stone's Christians had an ordained ministry and a higher concept of the Ministerial office, and insisted that only the ordained may baptize and preside over the Lords Supper.

Alexander Campbell's Disciples on the other hand were actually anti-clerical and believed in the priesthood of all believers in the sense that any believer may baptize and serve Communion.

THE NAME

Barton Stone's Christians were adamant in wearing the name of "Christian", believing this to be a divinely appointed name.

Alexander Campbell's followers preferred "Disciples." Campbell himself concluded that "Christian" was given in derision by outsiders and not divinely given at all! In the first years following the Union, the name Christian was more widely used, but eventually the name Disciples prevailed, though both names have been used in identifying both the Church and its members.

FREQUENCY OF THE LORDS SUPPER

Alexander Campbell's Disciples served the Lords Supper every first day of the week.

Barton Stone's Christians observed it on a less frequent/irregular basis.

ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Barton Stone's Christians had a broader view of the work of the Holy Spirit beyond the Scriptures, both in the conversion of the Sinner and in the life of the Believer.

Alexander Campbell's Disciples were inclined to relegate the Spirit's influence to the scriptures and to the preaching of the word.

UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS - While both the Disciples and the Christians were unity conscious, the idea of uniting all men in Christ was more predominant with the Christians. The Disciples/Reformers were more concerned with the restoration of the Ancient Order.

SO WHAT THEN DID THEY HAVE IN COMMON?

Both the Stone Christians and Alexander Campbell's Reformers/Disciples gave high priority to the unity of all believers. John 17 was not an option. Unity in general on the American frontier often times meant life or death

Both groups practiced baptism by immersion for Believers only, with both Stone and Campbell personally rejecting their sprinkling and being immersed.

They both made faith and obedience to Christ the only basis of fellowship, rejecting all human creeds and human names as being divisive, and looking to the Bible as their only rule for faith and practice.

Both groups had a fierce common enemy, Calvinism, of which both groups adamantly rejected its principle doctrines!

IN CONCLUSION

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, nearly 175 years after those wonderful events that took place at the old Christian Church on Hill Street in Lexington, KY that brought us together as a people, we their heirs here in the Greater Austin area have a wonderful opportunity to carry on that original vision. However, that doesn't necessarily mean re-hammering the merger of our three (3) streams. Whether we recognize it or not, God has already completed the merger. Our responsibility is to simply recognize and celebrate our common heritage and acknowledge our Brothers and Sisters in Christ and learn how to cooperate.

Like Barton Stone's Christians and Alexander Campbell's Disciples, we may not come to full agreement on every doctrinal issue. Like you, I am not here today to apologize for what I believe. I hold precious those truths I have been taught from a Child to my current age.

Neither am I here to minimize the importance of any of the doctrinal beliefs of anyone in this room, but I am here to tell you that I have come to the conclusion that I cannot restrict fellowship only to those who agree with me on every point of my interpretation of doctrine. The Architect of the Great Wall of China could have taken lessons from some of us in each of our Streams on how to put up obstacles that no one could overcome. At age 56, I'm tired of building walls, I'd rather build bridges.

This journey we're taking of reconciliation is long overdue. Even though we are saved by grace we have two God given responsibilities, our mission and our purpose as a people. Our mission is to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to the world while our purpose is to build up the body of Christ. When

you put it in its proper perspective, both our mission and purpose lead directly through Jesus final prayer for the Unity of his people in John 17 to the very foot of the cross.

You see, when I kneel before the Lord at judgment, I believe the final question that will be put to me, as the Lord God looks into my eyes, will not center on those all-important theological questions of:

- (1.) didn't you understand what was essential vs. non-essential;
- (2.) couldn't you figure out what Silence of the Scriptures allowed and didn't allow;
- (3.) nor why didn't you recognize the difference between disputable matters and absolutes;
- (4.) nor where were you when we determined what was hermeneutically correct and incorrect.

You see, I firmly believe that final question will simply be how much did you love me and how much did you love your brothers and sisters?

I have a lot of brothers and sisters in this room this morning and I think I'm simply going to love on you. I want to be able to give God the right answer.

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