**THE RESTORATION OF APOSTOLIC PEACHING, Part 2**

**Introduction:** In continuing the study of *The Restoration of Apostolic Preaching,* we emphasize this again as the *cornerstone* of the Restoration. Without apostolic preaching, the movement would have been stillborn. We also called attention to the fundamental traits that distinguish apostolic preaching, which the pioneer restorers understood to be essential to its restitution. These may be identified as *character*, *commitment*, and *conduct*. The first distinctive attribute of apostolic preaching is the character of the preacher. He must be a *good man*. We discussed this in the first part of our study. The second distinctive attribute of apostolic preaching is the preacher’s commitment to the inspired message. This is the focal point of part two.

Commitment to the Bible alone as their guide was the most important obligation undertaken by the pioneer restorers. It was the aim of every preacher who desired to restore the apostolic order to speak only as the oracles of God. This made the pioneers as a city on a hill that could not be hidden in the midst of a world where divine truth was obscured by creeds, ecclesiastical institutions, and traditions of men. Sectarian preaching was characterized by homiletic discourses, often with little biblical substance, among educated ministers, and by emotional harangues that were more ranting and raving than spiritually enlightening, among uneducated preachers, of which there were many.

One needs to understand the chaos and confusion, as well as the academic and biblical ignorance of many sectarian preachers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in appreciate Alexander Campbell’s fierce war on the clergy in the *Christian Baptist*. This of course was also the condition that Thomas Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, and others had to cope with in their effort to persuade people to forsake the inventions of men in religion so as to return to the authority of the Scriptures alone.

There was also extensive ignorance of the Bible among the people generally, which the creed bound clergy did little to relieve. S.J. Mills, a Bible society representative, made many journeys distributing Bibles in frontier America. He reported in 1815 that there were, in the sparsely settled land between the Allegheny Mountains and the Mississippi River, 76,000 families without the Bible and that the number was increasing yearly. The Great Western Revival of the early 1800s helped arouse people from the religious indifference that characterized the post-Revolutionary War period, but contri-buted little to Bible knowledge. Not all witnesses thought much Bible was preached. It is true that Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians worked in harmony in the revivals. The Cane Ridge revival of 1801 had a bearing on the Restoration work of Barton W. Stone. But the conversions in those revivals had no relation to that of the 3,000 on Pentecost.

Lorenzo Dow, the maverick Methodist preacher who traversed the American frontier, may have had contact with Barton W. Stone. They were contemporary, shared some common experiences, and knew some of the same people. Stone taught a while in Hope Hull’s school at Washington, Georgia. It was Hull that converted Dow at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1792. Dow witnessed the strange behavior of converts in the Kentucky revivals, but he had a more reasonable explanation for the phenomenon than Stone, who thought the violent behavior were acts of God. However, Dow is described as “a shrewd observer who realized that exhorters like himself produced these strange ‘gyrations.’” Whatever impetus these revivals gave to the Restoration, it was the giant leap from human creeds to the Bible alone as authority in religion that brought about the movement.

The Restoration work of Stone began when he and four other Presbyterian preachers withdrew from the Synod of Kentucky to avoid censure for their participation in the Western Revival. They formed an independent presbytery of which Stone writes: “Under the name Springfield Presbytery we went forward preaching and constituting churches; but we had not worn our name more than one year, before we saw it savored of a party spirit. With the manmade creeds we threw it overboard, and took the name Christian … Having divested ourselves of all party creeds, and party names, and trusting alone in God, we became a byword and laughing stock to the sects around; all prophesying our speedy annihilation. Yet from this period I date the commencement of that reformation, which has progressed to this day. Through much tribulation and opposition we advanced, and churches and preachers were multiplied.”1

*The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* was drawn up in 1804 to set forth the reasons for the institution’s dissolution. Three of twelve items in the historic document are significant in view of the message of the Restoration preachers. Item Three says: “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.”* This shows that the Bible alone was to be recognized as authority in religion and that “the people” have the right to study it for themselves, without submission to any human creed or interpretations by the clergy. This is more emphatically stated in Item Seven: “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.”2

In regard to the ministry itself, Item Four calls for candidates for the ministry to 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.”3 This, if honestly applied, would commit preachers to the word of God alone as their message. The things mentioned as having no place in a preacher’s teaching were, and yet are, the doctrines of men that contaminate the gospel and pervert the word of its proclaimers. Education is a wonderful thing, if one doesn’t let it “go to his head.” But all too often when a person goes through the higher educational system, especially the post graduate programs of prestigious universities—secular and religious—some degree of the human philosophy in which they have been immersed will almost surely stick to them. This can, and often does, hamper the purity of the message preached by even the best of men.

Twenty years later, writing in the initial issue of *The Christian Messenger*, Stone spoke passionately of the preacher’s message, both in positive and negative terms. For this pious and persecuted evangelist, to have errors “corrected and removed from the church” and “to have truth restored in her heavenly, captivating robes, unadorned with the tinsel of human wisdom,” was his utmost desire; and he believed it was also the desire of every honest Christian in the land. He continued: “Therefore, unappalled at the dangerous attempt, not discouraged at the attendant difficulties, we will boldly, though humbly, advance to the work.”4 Regarding “the Bible alone” as the standard by which all doctrines and spirits are to be tried, he was fully committed to holding it fast. “Should we be so happy as to find the error,” he said, “we shall be compelled by our benevolence for man, and love of truth, to expose it to view; and to endeavor to exhibit the doctrine of the Bible, unsullied by the unhallowed touch of man’s wisdom.”5

In naming five things that he believed necessary to prepare the mind for investi-gating and receiving the truth, Stone wrote: “We must believe that the Bible was addressed to rational creatures, and designed by God to be understood for their profit. When we open the Bible under the impression that it is a book of mysteries, understood only by a few learned ministers, we are at once discouraged from reading and investigat-ing its contents. But believing it was written for our learning and profit, and therefore addressed to our understanding, we are encouraged to read and diligently search its sacred pages. The man, who does this, with prayerful attention to its instructions, will find the truth, and walking in it, will *find her ways pleasantness, and all her paths peace*.”6

While Stone believed the word of God could be understood by ordinary people and that it alone should be the message of the preacher, he knew that sacrifices were required of one that speaks only as “the oracles of God.” *Believing* that the Bible is the sole authority in religion is one thing and *preaching* it to lost souls is quite another. It is hard for us today to fully appreciate what it cost the pioneers to restore apostolic preaching. Stone said: “To approach the Bible, with the desire and determination to learn and practice the truth there revealed, in despite of all opposition, requires a greater degree of fortitude and self-denial than is generally possessed by the professors of religion in the present day. To be stigmatized as weak—to be accounted as fools, when we take the best method to become wise—to lose the smiles, approbation and friendship of the circle, in which we have long moved with great pleasure—to incur the frowns of our dearest relatives and friends, the sore displeasure of the sect of Christians, with which we may be united—these are not light things; but these must be expected by the man, that dares … form a scriptural conviction that they are wrong.”7

The determination of the pioneer preachers to restore the *message* of apostolic truth required more than understanding it and more than knowing that it should be preached. Jesus said: “If you know these things, happy [blessed] are you if you do them.” All who knew the truth did not preach it. It was necessary for the pioneers also to imbibe the “fortitude and self-denial” of the first century preachers. Thus, Stone dwelt at length on the attitude required to preach the ancient gospel. “We must possess the mind of the honest Baptist, to be willing to decrease, that Christ may increase—to be willing for truth’s sake, to be rejected by all, even to be excluded from the society, with which we may be associated, however popular and respectable it may be…. We must be willing to give up all worldly gain or wealth, for the sake of truth.... We must learn ‘to cease from man’ … however pious, learned, or great he may be accounted…. We should follow them as far as they follow Christ, but no farther.”8

When Thomas Campbell wrote *Declaration and Address* in 1809, he also advocated the unity of Christians on the Bible alone. Both in the nine resolutions of the “Declaration” and in the more extensive “Address,” he emphatically and repeatedly stressed the importance of the preacher’s message being confined to the Bible alone, with the complete rejection of “human opinions and the inventions of men as of any authority, or as having any place in the Church of God.” His plea was to return to and to hold fast “the original standard; taking the Divine word alone for our rule.” He seems to have been as concerned with rejecting “all mixture of human opinions and inventions of men,” as in promoting “simple evangelical Christianity.” He recognized that preaching the word while holding to human laws, traditions, and philosophy would render a restoration of the ancient order impossible, and that it was the very cause of the religious chaos from which he was trying to extricate them.

Among the things Campbell said the Christian Association promoted was the “support of a pure Gospel ministry, that shall reduce to practice the whole form of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God.” He virtually repeated that in describing the kind of preachers it would, “to the utmost of its power, countenance and support.” Only such ministers, he said, as those who “exhibit a manifest formity to the original standard in conversation and doctrine, in zeal and diligence … without attempting to inculcate anything of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship of the Christian Church, or anything as matter of Christian faith or duty, for which there can not be expressly produced a ‘Thus saith the Lord, either in express terms, or by approved precedent.”9

*Declaration and Address* is not an easy document to read. It was written in a style that is strange to the modern reader. It is wordy, rambling, and repetitious, and Campbell often had trouble finding a period that he liked. Yet, his statements are plain and his aim and purpose clearly set forth. The work is not without flaws, but it is generally considered the most important treaties in the early Restoration Movement. Even so, it remains largely unknown by members of the Lord’s church today. Recognizing my own ignorance of Thomas Campbell’s major contribution to restoring New Testament Christianity, some time ago, I decided to make a thorough study of the document. I first read and studied it for myself, making extensive notes. Then I read about a dozen papers on the document, mostly by restoration historians or university doctors of something or other. One paper was a compendium of what about a dozen others had briefly written about it, ranging from Tolbert Fanning to Homer Hailey.

After this study, I wrote twelve articles on Campbell’s monumental work. It was evident that Campbell stressed the unity of Christians and, as one writer said, “shouted [it] from every page.” But the means by which the unity Campbell sought was to be *achieved*, which he “shouted” just as loudly throughout the work, if not on “every page,” is unity *on the Bible alone*, which requires all to accept the teaching, faith, and practice of the apostolic church. So we come again to the message of the Restoration, which is the Bible alone. Of course, Campbell did not understand every aspect of the truth when he wrote this work, but he did misunderstand that the *message* was and is unity on the *word of God* and upon it *alone*.

No greater abuse of Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address* arises among heirs of the Restoration than attempts to ignore, rationalize, or discredit the instrumen-tality he advanced to achieve unity among Christians. Some see the document as “a clarion call to institutional church unity.” Others view it as the “wellspring of the ecumenical movement.” No serious student of the treatise denies that it sprang from Campbell’s primary desire for unity among people bitterly divided by human names, creeds, and institutions. But his devotion to unity is so linked to restoration, as the means of its success, that one cannot be uprooted without uprooting the other.

Perhaps one of the more liberal analysts of Campbell’s work has suggested the most effective means of circumventing his call for unity on the Bible alone. He said: “We need a new ‘Declaration and Address’ that speaks to the needs of Christ’s body in the world of 2000 A.D. as appropriately as the original did in the world of 1800.” His solution to putting Campbell’s plea for unity on some broad ecumenical basis other than the word of God alone, it seems, is simply to discard Campbell’s work altogether and rewrite it to suit a more broadminded agenda. The trouble is that it would not be *Campbell’s Declaration and Address.* It seems to me, that the very idea of a *new* *Declaration and Address* is a tacit admission that the old *Declaration and Address* cannot be modified, even by the most skilled manipulators to fit the desire for religious unity without the Bible getting in the way. Since a new *Declaration and Address* could not have Campbell’s name on it, liberal readers of the document will likely continue to hear him “shout” about unity and “whisper” about the Bible alone as the means. They turn their hearing aid up high on the first and mute it on the second. But the two facets of the document are so skillfully woven together by that wise old weaver from Ireland that they cannot be separated without unraveling the whole thing.

The revisionist interpreters of *Declaration and Address* appear to know more about what Campbell thought than Campbell himself. Affecting a scholarly appraisal of his work, they glibly glide over what he *said* and tell us what they would like for us to *think* he meant to say. Then wrapping themselves in an aura of academic exclusivity, they seek to intimidate any peon historian who questions their conclusions. They know that few will take the time and effort to study Campbell’s document for themselves. So they can fool a lot people. But why do they do this? Why not just go ahead and write a new *Declaration and Address* for themselves and be done with it? The answer is, I think, because they want the prestige of having Thomas Campbell to seemly endorse their perversions of his work.

Taking the thirteen propositions that Campbell gave in the document easily make the case for the principles he stated earlier in an address to the Christian Association. As Robert Richardson reports it, he “insisted with great earnestness upon a return to the simple teaching of the Scriptures,” and stated in conclusion “in the most simple and emphatic terms, the great principle or rule upon which he understood they were acting.” Then he said to his hushed auditors: “That rule my highly respected hearers is this, that, ‘*Where Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent*.’”10 Time does not permit a detailed discussion of the points made in *Declaration and Address,* but we will notice some specific statements made in it.

Campbell wrote: “…the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.” Again: “Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the Church, or be made a term of communion among Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.” Then these thoughts: “…that [the church’s] ministers, duly and Scripturally qualified, [should] inculcate none other things than those very articles of faith and holiness expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God.” “‘Union in truth’ is our motto. The Divine word is our standard; in the Lord’s name do we display our banners.” And finally: “Our humble desire is to be his standardbearers, to fight under *his* banner, and with *his* weapons, ‘which are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.’”11 The simplicity of Campbell’s restoration ideal is too simply, clearly, and repeatedly stated to be successfully contradicted.

Alexander Campbell adopted the basic principles of *Declaration and Address*, but he also made application of them. As he applied these principles to practice, he rejected sprinkling for immersion [1812], made a clear distinction between the Mosaic Law and the gospel [1816], and recognized baptism “for the remission of sins [1823].” He more extensively applied these principles in a series of twenty-four articles on, *A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things*, published in the *Christian Baptist* from February 1825 to May 1828. The more distinctive the Restoration became to Campbell, the less emphasis he placed on unity, because it created more obstacles for the denominational world to accept. These articles are rich in their appeal to the Bible alone as authority for all that is needed to restore the apostolic order, and that are candid in his complete rejection of any effort to affect unity among Christians on any other basis. Near the beginning of the series, Campbell wrote: “To attempt to unite the professing disciples by any other means than the word of the apostles … is, then, an attempt to overrule the will of heaven, to subvert the throne of the Great King, to frustrate the prayers of the Son of the Blessed.”12

Campbell further said: “But *a restoration of the ancient order of things*, it appears, is all that is contemplated by the wise disciples of the Lord, as it is agreed that this is all that is wanting in the perfection, happiness, and glory of the christian [sic] community…. Now in attempting to accomplish this, it must be observed, that it belongs to every individual and to every congregation of individuals to discard from their faith and their practice every thing that is not found written in the New Testament of the Lord and Saviour, and to believe and practice whatever is there enjoined. This done, and every thing is done which ought to be done.”13

One could go through the writings of the pioneers of the Restoration and find a constant appeal to the Scriptures for all that is to be believed and practiced in restoring the apostolic order, and an equally clear affirmation that everything else must be rejected as having no place in the service of God. In 1835, in *Christianity Restored*, later renamed *The Christian System,* Campbell said that the aim of the movement, so far as the Campbells were concerned, beginning with *Declaration and Address*, was “for uniting … 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 approved president, ‘for every article of faith and item of religious practice.”14 In his preface to the revised edition, Campbell wrote: “While … we would, if we could, either with the tongue or the pen, proclaim all that we believe, and all that we know, to the ends of the earth, *we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as the foundation of all Christian union and communion.* Those who do not like this will please show us a more excellent way.”15

Through the first generation, or from the time when the Reformers associated with Alexander Campbell and the Christians associated with Barton W. Stone began to unit until about the time of the War Between the States, the Restoration views of the Campbells, Stone, Scott, and others fairly well prevailed. It was not until after the war that the message of the restorers began to take on diverse points of view, which would eventually divide the movement into two and then three separate “brotherhoods,” or “fellowships.” Every division from that caused by instrumental music, the pastor-preacher ministry, and missionary societies, has been due to a departure from the original message of “union in truth.”

**Notes**

1Rogers, John. *Biography of Barton W. Stone*.

2Fowe, F.L., ed. *Pioneer Sermons and Addresses.*

3Ibid.

4*Christian Messenger*, Nov. 1926.

5Ibid.

6Ibid.

7Ibid.

8Ibid.

9Rowe. *Pioneer Sermons.*

10Richardson, Robert. *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell,* Vol. 1.

11Rowe. *Pioneer Sermons.*

12*Christian Baptist,* Mar. 1825.

13Ibid.

14Campbell, Alexander. *The Christian System*.

15Ibid.

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