

The Search for Truth:
A History of the Restoration Movement
“The Stone & Campbell Revival”
November 26, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

We left off last week by introducing Barton W. Stone. He was originally from MD. He had been baptized as an infant into the Church of England. Stone studied in NC and became a Presbyterian, despite his serious misgivings about the Westminster Confession theology. He began preaching for the Presbyterian Church, however, and eventually landed in north central KY, under the Transylvania Presbytery, preaching for the Cane Ridge and Concord Presbyterian Churches. It is there, in 1801, that we take up this lesson.

Let us briefly review the Five Points of Calvinism because they'll crop up again in this study...

- T - Total Hereditary Depravity**
- U - Unconditional election**
- L - Limited atonement**
- I - Irresistible Grace**
- P - Perseverance of the Saints**

BARTON W. STONE'S RESTORATION EFFORTS:

In his effort to be ordained, Stone had to go before the Transylvanian Presbytery, which he did in 1798. Stone was famously asked: **“Do you receive and adopt the [Westminster] Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine as taught in the Bible?”** To which Stone famously replied: “I do, as far as I see it consistent with the Word of God.” For the Presbytery, that was enough.

But Stone had problems. Calvinism teaches that man is totally depraved and cannot do one good thing without the assistance of the Holy Spirit of God. But how, Stone asked himself, could that doctrine be reconciled with persuading men to repent and believe? Why preach to men to believe if they were totally depraved and could not? Stone struggled with questions like that.

In 1801, Stone was in Logan County, KY at a revival held by James McGready, whom we have met before. In that revival, Stone came to realize that faith was not a gift from God given through the Holy Spirit but rather that it was provided through the Word of God. He decides to go back to hold his own revival in the fields surrounding **Cane Ridge** in Bourbon County. Anyone could be saved if they desired; it just took faith and sinners could believe and be saved. That was a very *un*Calvinistic doctrine!

He held the revival in August of that year and a large “camp meeting” was conducted that even made its way into my American History college textbook. Twenty-thirty thousand people came to the revival and preachers from the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians all preached on tree stumps at the same time.

But, Stone was not teaching Presbyterian doctrine. He, along with a few other Presbyterian preachers who were in agreement with Stone (Robert Marshall, Richard McNemar, John Dunlavy, and John Thompson), created quite a controversy. Another Presbytery, the Washington Presbytery, critiqued Richard McNemar. He denied the doctrine of limited atonement and said a believer has the power to believe at any time. He also insisted that he would be bound by no system but the Bible.

Well, all five men were all hauled before the Synod of Kentucky to explain why they weren't teaching according to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Well, the men decided they would simply withdraw from the Synod. That was the beginning of Stone's break with the Presbyterian Church.

He and his fellow preachers decide they will set up their own presbytery, which they called the Springfield Presbytery. In their document they wrote up to justify their new presbytery, they affirmed that they were going to abandon all authoritative creeds except the Bible. Fifteen congregations were started by men holding these convictions.

But, within a year, the men realized that while they were rejecting human creeds, they had inadvertently created a new one and so they wrote up a document called "**The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery.**" This document is less than 800 words long. Among its doctrines are:

- 1. The presbytery would die and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large.**
- 2. They would not make laws for the government of the Church. The people would be free to go back to the Bible.**
- 3. Men who wanted to preach would study the Scriptures, pray, and be licensed by God to preach.**
- 4. The churches of Christ would govern themselves.**
- 5. Churches would choose their own preachers and support him with freewill offerings.**
- 6. The Bible is the only sure guide to heaven; cast other books into the fire.**
- 7. Preachers and people should cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance.**

They further wrote that the NT does not know of any church sessions, presbyteries, synods, general assemblies, etc. Things that were unscriptural, they would abandon.

Critics of Stone and his fellow preachers called them "New Light Christian Church," the phrase "new light" being a pejorative term for any off-shoot brand of denomination.

As you might expect, the subject of infant baptism came up. Robert Marshall, one of the preachers, decided that the Baptists were right that baptism should be by immersion. The men studied the issue, came to the same conclusion and immersed each other. Stone would eventually come to understand that immersion is actually for the forgiveness of sins and only penitent believers should be immersed.

Stone set about establishing churches in and around Lexington, KY and established an academy, Rittenhouse Academy, in Georgetown, KY. Richard McNemar and John Dunlavy would be caught up in the new Shaker religion. Robert Marshall and John Thompson would eventually return to the Presbyterian Church.

Meeting Rice Haggard, Stone decided it would be best to simply describe themselves as "Christian" and they began promoting unity based on the Bible. Stone began publishing the *Christian Messenger* in November 1827 in Georgetown, KY.

I will have to overlap some in my chronology but let us move forward with the story of Barton Stone.

Stone and another Reformer coming out of the Presbyterian Church, Alexander Campbell, whose story I'll tell next week, met in **Georgetown, KY in 1824** to discuss their similarities and differences. They were very largely similar in their approach to the Scriptures. Stone's group had insisted on the name "Christian" while the followers of Alexander Campbell preferred the name Reformers or Reformed Baptists. The two branches formally united April 24, 1831.

At a join meeting in 1835, "Raccoon" John Smith concluded a speech by saying, "Let us, then my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but let us come to the Bible and to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us all the light we need."

Stone would move to Jacksonville, IL in 1834 and die November 1844 in Hannibal, MO. His body was eventually removed and reburied at Cane Ridge when it was made into a shrine to Stone and his efforts. We will have occasion to mention Stone frequently in the next few weeks. But, let's move back to the other side of the ocean for a moment...

THOMAS CAMPBELL'S RESTORATION EFFORTS:

February 1, 1763 saw the introduction of Thomas Campbell into the world in northern Ireland, the oldest of eight children. His dad was a Catholic for a while and then changed to the Church of Ireland, a branch of the Church of England. Thomas Campbell was a serious student of the Scriptures and was repelled by the cold formalism of Anglican worship practices. So, he moved over to the Presbyterian Church.

With Presbyterianism and its Westminster Confession of Faith being heavily Calvinistic, Thomas started looking for a religious experience, the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. As he waited, he became filled with doubts, anxiety, and fear. The Presbyterians were divided into different groups. One group, believing in a church's ability to select their preacher, separated from the "mother church" and formed what was called the "Seceder Presbyterian" Church. Well, the Seceders grew to be large and that caused a problem with people living in towns that were predominantly Seceders but they, themselves, might not be in agreement with the Seceders on the issue of the preachers. So, with the town being called a "burgher," you had Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Churches and **Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Churches**. This controversy was going on in Scotland but it spilled over into Ireland and into the life of Thomas Campbell. The Irish Presbyterians were forced to choose sides in the Seceder Burgher, Seceder Anti-Burgher Presbyterian controversy.

Thomas Campbell was originally a part of the Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church in Ireland and became a school teacher as he studied the Bible. He attended the University of Glasgow and attended a theological seminary. He married a woman named Jane and the two of them had a son named Alexander in 1788 whom we will discuss extensively.

Thomas Campbell ministered among the Presbyterians in Ireland for nine years. During that period of time, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland divided once again. This time, it had to do with civil authorities having influence over church affairs; that's what happens when you have a close state-church environment. So, those who wanted to leave that behind were called "New Lights" while the ones wanting to maintain the "status quo" were called the "Old Lights." Thomas Campbell found himself a member of the "**Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church**." He finally said to himself, "This is ridiculous! Why can't one be simply a Christian and a Christian only?"

Well, Campbell came under the influence of a few different men, a few I have mentioned before. John Walker was a priest in the Church of England which he left because he wanted to

follow just the commands of the NT. I have already mentioned John Glas and the Haldane brothers and Robert Sandeman - if you missed that lesson, I would be glad to e-mail it to you or print it out for you, as I would any lesson I teach. All of these men were wanting to go back to the NT and follow just the simply commands of NT Christianity. Each of these men, to one degree or another was trying to follow the NT pattern: congregational autonomy with elders and deacons, weekly Lord's Supper, calling yourself the "church of Christ" or simply "Christian."

In **1797, Thomas Campbell cast his lot with the Haldane brothers.** In 1805, Haldane published a book in which he tried to show that all church practices needed to be based on the precepts of the NT. The two Haldane brothers also became convinced that immersion was the biblical form of baptism and so they called themselves the "Scotch Baptists." Robert Sandeman had emigrated to the US in 1764 and established congregations following his teachings in the New England states.

Thomas Campbell became convinced that the divisions, not just within Presbyterianism but in all Protestantism, was wrong and decided it was virtuous to try and go back to NT Christianity. He met with the two Branches of the Seceder Presbyterian Churches and encouraged them to be united; that what had divided them was a Scottish issue, not an Irish issue. The Burghers and Anti-Burghers voted on unity and decided to break off from the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church but that was voted down.

Thomas Campbell himself decided to emigrate to the US and **landed in Philadelphia in the spring of 1807.** He was given the opportunity by the Presbyterians to preach in western Pennsylvania, Washington, PA. But, the divisions that had wracked the Presbyterian Churches in Scotland and had poured over into Ireland had also found their way into the Presbyterian Churches in America.

But Campbell could not tolerate all the division. So, when he served the Communion, he did so for all those who wished to partake, regardless of which branch they were in. The first charges were filed against Thomas in October of 1807. It wasn't just serving the Lord's Supper to *everyone* but also charges that Campbell was not teaching Calvinism like he was supposed to. He was hauled before the local presbytery and was suspended from preaching for a time. So, Campbell severed ties with the Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterians.

He would write: "I absolutely refuse, as inadmissible and schismatic, the introduction of human opinions and human inventions into the faith and worship of the church. ...For what error or immorality ought I to be rejected, except it be that I refuse to acknowledge as obligatory upon myself, or to impose upon others, anything as of Divine obligation, for which I can not produce a 'Thus saith the Lord'?"

Campbell continued to preach where people would listen and in the summer of 1809, there was a meeting in Washington, PA in which Thomas Campbell insisted that men had gone outside of the Bible for their teaching and that had caused division within Christianity. He argued for a return to Scripture as the source for religious instruction. In that meeting, he concluded, "**Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.**"

A Seceder bookseller, named Andrew Munro, at that meeting stood up and said, "Mr. Campbell, if we adopt *that* as a basis, then there is an end of infant baptism." Campbell had not gone that far in his understanding yet; however, he responded, "If infant baptism be not found in Scripture, we can have nothing to do with it." Thomas Acheson, a third man at the meeting, jumped to his feet and shouted, "I hope I may never see the day when my heart will

renounce that blessed saying of Scripture, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' And he broke into tears. At which point, a fourth man at the meeting, a James Foster observed, "Mr. Acheson, I would remark that in the portion of Scripture you have quoted here, there is no reference, whatever, to infant baptism."

It would be some time before Thomas Campbell would fully realize what he was doing when he said, "Let's just take the Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice." It's one thing to talk about that in the abstract; it is something entirely different when your whole religious structure is built on a multitude of beliefs that have no basis in Scripture. Campbell, at that time, was reacting against the New Light / Old Light, Burgher / Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian division. At that moment, he did not realize that principle would lead him out of the Presbyterian church entirely. But he will.

The group met again in August of 1809 and called themselves the "Christian Association of Washington." They built a church building for their community that would also serve as a school house. When they met as an association again, in September, they agreed to a document that Thomas Campbell had drawn up that is a famous document within the history of the Restoration Movement. It is called the *Declaration and Address*.

You can "google" the *Declaration and Address* and read it. I'm not going to take the time to read it, but the primary principles are what we have seen coming out of other groups like the O'Kelly movement and the Elias Smith movement:

1. The church of Christ is one.
2. There should be no divisions among Christians.
3. Nothing should be forced upon Christians to believe except what the Scriptures require.
4. The NT was the authority for Christians.
5. If the Scriptures are silent, no human authority can make laws for the church.
6. We cannot bind human reasoning on mankind.
7. Creeds should not be used as tests of faith.
8. To be saved, people should: a.) Know they are lost; b.) have faith in Christ; c.) obey what He commands.
9. Christians should love each other.
10. Division is evil.
11. Neglecting the will of God and making human opinions terms of fellowship is what have created denominations.

Here, we must take our leave of Thomas Campbell. We will look at Alexander Campbell next week as we intertwine the efforts of Thomas, Alexander and Barton W. Stone into one large movement to go back to the NT in their search for truth.