

The Search for Truth:  
A History of the Restoration Movement  
“Alexander Campbell’s Efforts at Restoration”  
December 3, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

As we study church history and the specific effort to go back to NT / biblical Christianity, we are currently looking at these restoration efforts among the Presbyterians. The last two weeks, we have introduced two Presbyterians: Barton W. Stone who largely worked in the south, specifically in Kentucky and southern Ohio and Thomas Campbell who emigrated to the US from Ireland and settled and began preaching in western Pennsylvania. But Thomas Campbell had a son, named Alexander, who will eventually eclipse his dad in efforts to restore biblical Christianity and Alexander will rise in influence such that he rubs shoulders with politicians during his lifetime. Let’s take a look at Alexander.

THE BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE:

Campbell was born in Ireland in September of 1788. We’ve spent some time on Alexander’s father already. Thomas was a severe critic but a kind disciplinarian and a scholar. Alexander was influenced by that. At an early age, Alexander was reading widely and memorizing vast swaths of great literature, including Scripture. He memorized passages in Greek, Latin, French and English literature. Frequently, Alexander would walk into his father’s study and see a Bible and a concordance on a stand at his finger tips.

As we have already mentioned, Thomas Campbell emigrated to the US in 1807 and settled in Pennsylvania. Alexander had told his dad that he had planned to emigrate as well. Thomas left first. In September of 1808, Alexander and the rest of the family set sail to come to America but a storm stopped them from sailing and they ended up in Scotland where Alexander decided to use his time wisely and enroll in Glasgow University.

It was here that Alexander came under the influence of men who had influenced Thomas as well as others: James and Robert Haldane as well as John Glas and Robert Sandeman. Alexander was at a semi-annual communion service with the Seceder Presbyterian Church and it was the custom to give tokens to those who were worthy to partake of the communion. Since Alexander was from out of town, he had to pass an exam on Saturday first. He passed the exam and received his token. But this whole process bothered Alexander as being unbiblical and divisive. When the communion plate came by, Alexander dropped in his token and did not partake. In his mind, he had withdrawn from the Seceder Presbyterian Church.

In July of 1809, Alexander and the family set sail for the new world and landed in New York on September 29th. He went to Philadelphia and headed to Washington, PA and on the way, he ran into his father who had heard that his son was coming. They had a long talk on the way back home and realized that their religious thinking was running along parallel paths.

A RESTORATION MOVEMENT FORMS:

Alexander Campbell once wrote:

“I have endeavored to read the Scriptures as though no one had read them before me; and I am so much on my guard against reading them today, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority or system whatever” (West, I:56).

Campbell was a hard worker. He awoke at 4:00 AM and worked until 10 at night. He had strong health, was rarely sick and had a cheerful disposition. Thomas and Alexander

worked on their farm, in their fields during the week, and preached on the weekend. At least Thomas did. In their small community, it was decided to build a church house, which they did on the banks of Buffalo Creek and it was there that Alexander preached his first sermon on September 16, 1810.

Well, it wasn't long before the subject of infant baptism came up, notably the birth of Alexander's first child, a little girl named Jane. Regarding infant baptism, Campbell did what every student of the Bible ought to do in order to understand the mind of God on any subject - he studied the word baptize in Greek. He came to understand that the word meant immersion and that there was nothing in Scripture favoring infant baptism. So, what did Alexander do? He made plans to be immersed according to the Scriptures.

He found a Baptist preacher who was willing to immerse Alexander and by the day of the immersion, his sister Dorothea along with his dad, Thomas, mom, and three other people, seven in all, decided they needed to be immersed. It was not long before the church where they worshiped and preached, the Brush Run Church, all followed suit.

Alexander would later write: "I had no idea of uniting with the Baptists more than with the Moravians or the mere Independents" (West, I:60).

In 1812, Campbell met with the Baptists and learned that they had no more use for their preachers than Campbell did. They saw preachers as defenders of denominationalism rather than preachers of the Gospel. So, Campbell and the Brush Run church decided to become members of the RedStone Baptist Association, despite the fact that the Baptists have their own creed, the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, adopted by the Baptists in 1742, which is as heavily Calvinistic as the Presbyterians' Confession of Faith.

But, tensions mount when Campbell refuses to tow the line with the Baptists. The straw that broke the camel's back was a sermon in 1816 called "Sermon on the Law," in which Campbell taught that the Christian was not under the Law of Moses. This sermon is really Campbell's most famous sermon and you can probably read it on the internet. The sermon hit the Baptists hard and Campbell was called a heretic and efforts were made to exclude him from the Baptist fellowship. That effort eventually fizzled out but it would rear its head again.

In 1818, Campbell opened up a school called the "Buffalo Seminary," which was short-lived. It closed down in four years. In 1819, Campbell was challenged to a debate by a Presbyterian named John Walker on baptism. Campbell was reluctant to go, seeing debates as odious and divisive. But, he eventually relented and held the debate near Mt Pleasant, OH in June of 1820 on the subject and mode of baptism. Walker's big argument was that baptism took the place of circumcision under the law of Moses and since circumcision was performed on infants, then baptism could be administered to infants. Since Campbell had been studying the different covenants for many years, he was able to successfully meet that argument.

In fact, Campbell was so impressed by the response to the debate that he issued a challenge to debate anyone on the subject of infant baptism. In 1823, he debated W. L. McCalla, another Presbyterian, in Washington, KY. In that particular debate, Campbell had as a moderator, a preacher among the reformers named Sidney Rigdon.

Rigdon is most well known as one of the strongest leaders in the Mormon Church. He was born in PA in 1793 and had been in the Baptist Church. But, following the printing of Campbell's debate with Walker on baptism, Rigdon decided to become a member of Campbell's group and he became a preacher for them. For three years, Rigdon was a member of Campbell's "inner circle." But, Rigdon believed that restoring the NT church also included supernatural gifts, such as healing, miracles, tongues, and prophecy so, in 1830, Rigdon

became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and was influential in that church for the next 14 years. That relationship ended when Rigdon had a serious disagreement with Brigham Young. He died of a stroke in 1876.

But, in this debate with McCalla in Washington, PA, Campbell came to the realization that baptism was not just by immersion and it wasn't just for adults but that it was also for the forgiveness of sins! That was a radical view in those days. Well, Campbell decided that debates were a fairly effective form of teaching the Gospel message.

In 1820, Campbell and his Brush Run Church joined a different Baptist association, the Mahoning Baptist Association because this association allowed its member churches more autonomy.

It was also due to the debate with Walker that Campbell realized just how influential the *published* Gospel could be. So, in 1823, Campbell started a paper called *The Christian Baptist*. To honor his adopted country, he published the first edition on July 4th. He edited this paper for seven years and denounced many prevalent religious practices, pride, worldliness, and what he perceived as paganism. He criticized creeds, confessions of faith, and authoritative councils. For future reference, through *The Christian Baptist*, Campbell criticized missionary societies. Campbell called for men to drop all things that had a human origin and go back to the Scriptures.

After seven years, Campbell stopped publishing *The Christian Baptist* for several reasons:

1. His followers were becoming known as "Christian Baptists."
2. By 1828, the Baptist churches were kicking "reformers" out of their fellowship.

But, in January of 1830, Alexander would start a new journal called the *Millennial Harbinger*. Many people of that age thought that the United States was simply something of a "promised land," with all of its freedoms and growth. It was in 1831 that the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville visited America and wrote such glowing terms of our country in his book *Democracy in America* in 1835. Well, Campbell thought that if he could get people to leave the shackles of creeds and religious laws written by men and be simply Christians and restore the "ancient order of things," then the Millennial kingdom would be ushered in. He believed he could help that through his writings.

We are getting ahead of ourselves, again, chronologically, but in 1849, Campbell had come to the conclusion that those churches associated with his efforts needed better organization so he called for a mass meeting of all reformers and Christians (this would include Barton Stone's group), to meet together, which happened in October of 1849 in Cincinnati, OH, the central point of the reformers efforts, geographically, at that time. It was at that meeting that the assembled Christians approved the creation of the American Christian Missionary Society, a group that would test the movements efforts at doing Bible things in Bible ways and would ultimately lead to a split in the movement which still exists today. Campbell was elected president of the Missionary Society, even though he had written against missionary societies earlier through *The Christian Baptist*.

When the Baptists and Methodists split over slavery in 1844 and 1845, Campbell used *The Millennial Harbinger* to keep those under his influence from splitting. Campbell was personally opposed to slavery but argued from the Scriptures that the Scriptures did not condemn slavery. That is disingenuous since slavery in the Roman Empire was not very much like slavery in America. But, be that as it may, he was largely successful.

The Civil War interrupted the circulation of the *Millennial Harbinger*, especially in the South. Alexander Campbell died in 1866, just after the Civil War and the magazine stopped being printed in 1870. By then, several other magazines were equally effective and, without Campbell's influence, the *Harbinger* ceased.

In *The Christian Baptist*, Campbell wrote: "it belongs to every individual and to every congregation of individuals to discard from their faith and their practice everything that is not found written in the New Testament of the Lord and Savior, and to believe and practice whatever is there enjoined" (West, I:71).

Campbell was busy farming, but also preaching, writing, and debating. He had a debate with a famous philosopher of that time, a Scotchman, Socialist, named Robert Owen. They debated Socialism versus Christianity in the largest Methodist church in Cincinnati, in April of 1829. I have this debate in my library; I have read it. He also debated a Roman Catholic priest named Bishop John Purcell in January 1837. In 1843, Campbell debated another Presbyterian, Nathan Rice, of Paris, KY, largely on Calvinism.

Also, in 1841, Campbell began Bethany College and he served as its president. Bethany College, now associated with the Disciples of Christ, is still in existence. We will take note of different men who go on to have influence in the restoration effort who studied under Campbell at Bethany College.

#### WALTER SCOTT:

Let me pause in the Campbell story to introduce you to yet another man. You know, if I were to ask you what you must do to be saved, you would probably give me a list of five things, right? Hear. Believe. Repent. Confess. Be baptized. Of course, those five steps are all correct but no Bible passage lists those five steps in a single text. Do you know who first came up with that? Walter Scott. Except Walter Scott's version was a little different. He would go into towns where he was scheduled to hold a revival and he would go to the school house and as kids would leave, he would tell them his "five-finger exercise:" faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The kids would go home, tell their parents, and their parents would come out to hear what this new doctrine was all about.

Scott was born in Scotland in 1796 and his mother wanted him to be a minister in the Scotch Presbyterian Church. He studied at the University of Edinburgh but set sail for the United States and landed in New York in July 1818. At first, he was a Latin teacher on Long Island. But he eventually emigrated west to Pittsburgh where he found a job teaching in an academy operated by a George Forrester. To Scott, Forrester was peculiar - he rejected all human creeds and claimed to take the Bible alone as his sole guide in matters of religion.

It did not take Scott long to see that infant baptism, in *his* Presbyterian Church, was without Scriptural authority. In fact, sprinkling and pouring themselves were not biblical baptism. Scott was immersed by George Forrester. In 1821, Mrs. Forrester shared a pamphlet with Scott that was written by an elder of a church under the influence of the Haldanes in NYC. The man's name was Henry Errett and it taught that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins. It was in that same year that Alexander Campbell had his thinking challenged, by the same pamphlet, as it relates to the purpose of baptism.

Through Walter Scott's studies, he came to a dramatic conclusion, which he called the "Golden Oracle" of the Bible: Jesus is the Son of God - the Messiahship of Jesus was the central idea of the Christian religion.

In 1821-22, Scott met Campbell and they came to understand their thinking was running along the same paths. Scott became a member of the Mahoning Baptist Association, preaching in Steubenville, OH. Scott became a very powerful and effective preacher in what was then called the "Western Reserve" of Ohio. It is said that Scott made more than 3,000 converts through his efforts. At one meeting, a man named William Amend, came to hear Scott preach. He said that he had been studying his Bible and came to believe that repentance and baptism were essential to salvation so whenever he heard someone preaching that same thing, he would be immersed. He heard Scott preach that very message and Scott baptized William Amend for the forgiveness of sins.

In January 1832, Scott published his own religious periodical, *The Evangelist*. He also wrote a book in 1836 called *The Gospel Restored*, a book which I have in my library. After Scott's first wife died and he remarried, he started an academy for girls in Covington, KY in 1852. Scott was also interested in the music of the church, paying \$300 of his own money to publish a hymnal with 700+ songs in it. He criticized "the endlessly repeated singing of the same hymn to the same tune, at present so common in our assemblies" (S-C E, 676).

Scott preached for decades but when the Civil War was heating up, right after Ft Sumter, SC fell in April of 1861, Scott passed away of pneumonia, broken hearted over what was happening in his adopted homeland.

Next week: "A United Restoration Movement"