

A Plea for Unity

Essentials—Non Essentials

The Restoration movement has been famous for several mottoes. A motto is a guiding principle. One motto says, "No Creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the divine name." Another motto is "We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only." Another is, "In faith . . . unity, in opinions . . . liberty, and in all things . . . love." Then there is the motto I want to speak about which brings to light essentials and non-essentials, or faith and opinion. That is the motto for which we are probably the most famous, "Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent."

This motto did not begin with Thomas or Alexander Campbell. Neither did this motto begin with Barton W. Stone. Neither did it begin with the Waldensians, who spoke out against the authoritative, dictatorship of Rome four centuries before Martin Luther. This motto, "Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent," actually began when the Apostle Paul called the church at Corinth back to the beginning of its foundations in the Christian faith. In I Corinthians 3:11 Paul insisted, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one

already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Apostasy began at Corinth. And this was less than ten years after Jesus Christ established His church in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Already the church had wandered from its beginning principles. The church had drifted into unspeakable immorality at Corinth and the membership had merely winked at it. So they needed to be restored to the essentials. In I Corinthians 3:18 Paul said, “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a fool so that he may become wise.” In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul said, “But even if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” Paul had received the Gospel directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, it is not a surprise to us that when Peter and John examined the Apostle Paul that they found that his teaching was pure and unadulterated. It was according to the Word of God.

Purity vs. Pollution

Over in the hills of central Pennsylvania there's a marvelous spring. This spring issues in a crystal clear pool of water at the foot of a cliff. Around this pool of water people have built a city called Belfont. They tell us that 11 million gallons of pure spring water flow down Spring Creek everyday from this spring high up in the hills. The temperature of that water has never varied more than 4 degrees, spring, summer, winter or fall. One hundred yards downstream from the source of the spring the water begins to be polluted. You can see a film of oil spreading over the water. Two miles downstream from the source it spreads into a dismal, gloomy, polluted swamp. The amazing thing is that all over those hills of central Pennsylvania there are many source of pollution. But nobody has ever found any pollution whatsoever in the spring water itself

at the source. Man does not know where that water comes from, but it has always been perfectly pure at the source.

The Pure Source . . . The Word of God

I think that the application is perfectly clear. The Bible is the pure source of the Word of God because the Bible comes from God Himself. All around there are many pools of polluted water. From denominational sources we have creeds written by men, books written by men, and church laws written by men. If you want the pure water itself you must go back of denominationalism and back of all books and back of all creeds and all laws written by men. We must go all the way back to the Word of God.

Today we are constantly interested in the current newscasts, but the Bible is really the latest and greatest newscast of all, because it comes from God. The books that are popular today fade away and are forgotten tomorrow, but the Word of God is unchangeable and continues year after year to be the best seller. Let us make it clear that the Bible is God's Word and as the Bible says in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness." There is not so much evidence that John Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* or evidence that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* or evidence that Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* as there is evidence that God Almighty, through His prophets, apostles and evangelists, wrote His Holy Word, His divine Word, the Bible!

The Church is One

The Bible makes it very clear that in the beginning that Christ established one church. In Matthew 16 we read the words of Jesus, "Upon this rock I will build My Church," possessive, singular. Jesus Christ did fulfill that promise and established His church in

Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. And for many years the church was one. It was united. All people who followed Jesus claimed simply to belong to His church. But then the divisions began to rear their ugly heads.

Division Begins

In the church at Corinth there was division, so Paul had to write to the Corinthians condemning them for this division. He said in I Corinthians 1:11, "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you." When divisions first reared their ugly heads in the church, it was over men. Men vying with men for popularity. Down through the years men have continued to divide the church over their personalities. Men have divided the church over their human teachings, human doctrines, human practices.

The Plea for Unity

By the time of the 1700's there were already more than 300 different denominations competing among themselves to try to be the biggest and the best and the most popular. Each one insisting that they were, indeed, the only ones who were going to Heaven. Therefore, shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century, in many religious circles there was a striving for restoration. Men wanting to restore themselves to the original church and to the original teaching of the Church.

Within the Methodist denomination there was James O'Kelly. In the Baptist denomination there was Abner Jones and Elias Smith. In the Presbyterian denomination there was Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell.

On August 4, 1794, the Methodist denomination held a meeting at Old Lebanon, Virginia. A committee of seven men had been

appointed to devise a plan of church government. Finally, they decided to lay aside every manuscript and go by the Bible alone. Rice Haggard stood up and said, "Brethren, the Bible is a sufficient rule of faith and practice. By it we are told that the disciples were called Christians and I move that, henceforth and forevermore, the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply." Following Rice Haggard's suggestion, a Brother Hafferty, of North Carolina, stood up and moved that they take the Bible itself as their only creed.

Just a little bit later in 1808, near Washington, Pennsylvania where Thomas Campbell lived, were some of his friends from Scotland. There was General Atchinson, Lt. Col. of the Twenty-second Regiment of the Pennsylvania Militia, James Foster and Thomas Hodgens, each of whom had come to this country from Ireland. In the houses of these friends, Thomas Campbell preached. His voice was also heard in Mable Groves, where they held open air services. In due time it became evident that many of these listeners were in sympathy with Thomas Campbell's views. He proposed one of the principal ones among them to have a meeting at his home to give more definite form to the movement. The house of Abraham Walters, located between Mt. Pleasant and Washington, Pennsylvania, was chosen. And it was here that one of the most famous meetings of the Restoration Movement was conducted. Thomas Campbell's speech closed as he quoted this famous motto, "Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent."

This idea that Thomas Campbell embodied in the motto was not new. Many, many years before, in 1659, Edward Stillingfleet, who later became Bishop of Worcester, had said, "For the church to require more than Christ Himself required, or to make conditions of her communion more than our Savior did, is wholly unwarranted."

Chillingsworth had written his book, *The Religion of Protestants: A Safeway to Salvation*, in 1637. And in this book he had argued that the Bible was the sole authority in matters of salvation. In this book, his conclusion read like this, "The Bible, I say, only is

the religion of Protestants.”

When Thomas Campbell quoted this motto it was not new, but it was revolutionary. Because, you see, prior to the time Thomas Campbell quoted the motto the Protestants applied it solely to Roman Catholic traditions. But when Thomas Campbell quoted the motto, people now realized that it struck with equal force against human Protestant creeds as it did against Catholic traditions. Quite naturally then, when Thomas Campbell first quoted these words and paused, there was a solemn hush that fell across that assembly showing the intensity of the emotions of the hour. Thomas Campbell sat down. A Scottish book seller by the name of Andrew Monroe was the first to break the silence. With great emotion he said, “Mr. Campbell, if we adopt that motto then that means there is an end to infant baptism.” Thomas Campbell replied, “Of course, if infant baptism is not found in the Bible we can have nothing to do with it.” Thomas Atchinson then stood up with tears in his eyes and he cried out, “I hope that I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of the scriptures, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of heaven.’” Having said that, he burst into tears. James Foster, who even in Ireland had opposed infant baptism arose and cried out, “Mr. Atchinson, I would remark that in that portion of scripture that you have just quoted, there is no reference whatever to infant baptism.”

We who are presently members of the Christian Church stand upon this principle. We believe with all our hearts that the Bible is the Word of God and that we must practice scriptural teaching. Wherever the Bible has spoken, that’s where we must stand and we must speak.

I. The Essentials

Have you ever had someone approach you and say, “What denomination do you belong to?” If you understand the principles of the Restoration Movement and if you know why you are a member of the Christian Church, you will immediately respond to that

question by saying, "I don't belong to any denomination." Immediately they're going to say, "Oh now, don't pull my leg, everybody belongs to some denomination. Now come out with it, what group do you belong to?" And then you will say, "I don't belong to any group. I just belong to Christ. I'm just simply a Christian." Then the questioner will say, "Well everybody belongs to Christ, everybody's a Christian. What creed do you believe?" You'll turn to Matthew 16 and say, "This is our creed, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, because you see, we have no creed, but Christ.'" And he'll say, "Come on, what book do you have that separates you from other religions." "The only book that we have is the Bible. We believe that the Bible is God's Holy Word." Then he'll say, "Everyone believes in the Bible. What name do you wear that distinguishes you from other followers of Christ?" Of course you say, "We don't have any name at all to wear to differentiate ourselves from other followers of Christ. We just simply wear His name because in Acts 11:26 the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch and I Peter 4:16 says, 'If any man shall suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name,' and in Acts 4:12 it says there is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." The questioner will say, "I know you must belong to some denomination. Surely you must have headquarters someplace. Where are your headquarters located?" "In Heaven. That's the only headquarters for the Christian Church."

We who are members of the Christian Church are not trying to be difficult. We are not trying to be argumentative. We are simply trying to stick true to our motto, "Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent." In things essential we must look to the Bible for thus sayeth the Lord. We must call Bible things by Bible names.

In denominational circles they may refer to the Lord's Supper as the "Eucharist" or they may refer to it as the "sacrament" or the "wine." Of course those are all unscriptural terms for the Lord's Supper. We simply call it the "Lord's Table" or the "Lord's Sup-

per.” We don’t refer to it as the “wine” because no place in the Bible is the Lord’s Supper called “wine.” It is referred to as the “fruit of the vine,” the bread and the fruit of the vine representing the broken body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are very particular to insist upon referring to Bible things by Bible names, even down to the preacher of the church. Sometimes people will ask, “What is your title?” Of course, I don’t have any title. I don’t want any title. You can just call me by my name or you can call me “Preacher,” because that is what I am; a preacher of the Gospel. Or you can call me “Brother,” because I am your brother in Christ. But I am not the Reverend. You know how it is in denominational circles, they call the preachers, “Reverend.” Well, we insist on calling Bible things by Bible names. There is only one time in the Bible that you read that word Reverend and that is in reference to God. The psalms say, “Holy and Reverend is His Name.” No man here on earth can be equal to God therefore we, as preachers, will not call ourselves Reverend. We will simply be called “preachers of the Gospel” or “Ministers of Christ,” which means servant, just like any Christian is a minister of Jesus Christ.

These are the essentials . . . belief in God, belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, belief in the Church of Christ that Jesus established in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, the belief in the ordinances of the church—the Lord’s Supper and Christian baptism as they are taught in the Bible. And “Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent.”

There’s not much difficulty when we appeal to the essentials because scripture backs up every point. Now let’s come to the difficult part . . . the non-essentials.

III. The Non-Essentials

“Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent.” Another way of saying it is, “In matters of opinion . . . Liberty.” Each member has the right to their own opinion wherever the Bible has not spoken. Isn’t it tragic the number of divisions that have been brought into the church over things that are not even found in the Bible?

What did Thomas Campbell mean when he said, "Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent"? The first part of the motto was a declaration of loyalty to Jesus Christ and every teaching of His Word. The second part of the motto asserted human freedom in matters of opinion. It was a declaration of independence on the part of Thomas Campbell from religious dictators. It's a very true principle and it applied correctly brings wonderful results, but if applied wrongly brings disastrous results.

Interesting Stories

From the early days of the Restoration comes a very amusing story about a pioneer who was going out west. At the evening time he was tired and worn out, so he stopped at a farm home and asked if he could spend the night. The Christian people who lived there very graciously said, "Yes. Welcome to our home." He ate supper with them. As it came time to go to bed, the host spoke up and said, "As we are a Christian family, we always have family devotions at our house before we retire for the night. We would like to invite you to join in our family devotions." This early Restoration pioneer got very nervous and said, "Now see here, I believe that we must follow the Bible and the Bible is silent on the matter of family devotions. I do not find anywhere in the Bible where the New Testament Church had family devotions. Because nothing is mentioned in the scriptures about family devotions, I will have you to know that I'm against it and I'm not going to join in with you in any family devotions, because we ought to keep quiet where the Bible is silent."

The fellow had misunderstood the motto. It says, "Where the Bible speaks . . . we speak. Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent," but he said, "Where the Bible is silent, that is where I'm going to preach." He caused a division in the Body of Christ over something that the Bible doesn't even mention.

One of the earliest editorials of J.H. Garrison was to refute a

letter that had been written in over the matter of church baptisteries. It seems as though one dear brother got all upset and he wrote in and he said, "What is this business about having a box in the church in which to baptize people? When you read in the New Testament you find that Jesus was baptized in the flowing stream in the Jordan River. No one read anything in the Bible about a box in the church, where you would baptize people and therefore I'm against these baptisteries." He caused a great big division over having a baptismal pool in the church building simply because you don't read anything about it in the Bible. His motto was, "Where the Bible is silent . . . I'm going to preach and cause a division in the church."

The story goes on. There were those who caused divisions over the Sunday School. The argument goes "you find nothing in the New Testament about the Sunday School, therefore, we're against it." And then some churches divided over the question of music in the church. They said, "Where do you read anything in the New Testament about instrumental music in the church? Therefore, we're going to preach about it." They caused a great big division over it. Then there were those who said, "Where do you read anything in the New Testament about Bible Colleges? It's not there, therefore, we're going to be against the Bible Colleges." They started another denomination over that. Then, of course, we get down to the subject of women. Some people said, "Where do you read anything in the New Testament about women putting lipstick on their lips?" So they started preaching against lipstick and you have whole denominations built on anti-lipstick. And, then in more modern times, there's been a great division caused over women wearing slacks to church. Some churches have actually split over that and they've said, "There is nothing in the Bible about it, therefore, we're going to be against it." I even heard about one church that divided because they read that verse in the Bible, where Paul says, "Let the women keep silent in the churches." Now, of course, it would take a whole sermon to deal on that one verse alone and we cannot get into that now, but the point is that

somebody took that verse literally without understanding what Paul was talking about. And, so, whenever a woman comes forward in that church to accept Christ as her Savior and to be baptized, they take her outside the church building and let her confess Christ outside the building because it says, "let the women keep silent in the church." It is completely ridiculous when you find the harm that has been done to Christendom by the abuse of such a noble motto, "Where the Bible is silent . . . we are silent."

Restoring the Original Property Lines

There was an old pioneer who moved from North Carolina to Central Tennessee. He staked out his homestead. He cleared the land. He built his cabin. He farmed the land for many years. Then the old pioneer died. He had a will and he left his homestead to his children. But his children had scattered far and wide. They were living in many different places in America. They were each busy with their own lives, with their own families. They did not have time to go to central Tennessee to lay claim to their rightful possession, their father's homestead.

So, as the years came and went, other homesteaders moved in and they encroached on the property lines of the old homestead. One man on the north began to farm part of the land. Another man on the south began to farm this part of the land. Another man on the west began to farm this part of the land and pretty soon the old fences were torn down and new fences were erected and eventually all former traces of that old homestead disappeared.

Then one day the children decided to go to central Tennessee and claim the homestead that was rightfully theirs. You can imagine the trouble that erupted as they tried to re-establish those original property lines. There were all kinds of arguments that developed with the neighbors. The man on the north wasn't happy because he had developed an orchard on the land that was disputed. The fellow on the south wasn't happy because if the original prop-

erty lines were restored it would cut out a spring out of his property. This fellow in the west wasn't happy because he had built some buildings on the land.

Finally, the state of Tennessee had to appoint a state surveyor. He came with the original papers outlining the homestead. The original lines all started at a certain oak tree which was very prominent in that section of Tennessee. So, the first job of the state surveyors was to find that very oak tree. As you might have guessed, someone had cut that tree down. However, the stump of the tree remained. Because of the description of the geography that was in the original papers, there was no doubt in anyone's mind. They were able to find the stump of the original oak tree where the original lines were drawn. Using their surveying instruments, they were able to re-establish and restore the original property lines of that homestead and the heirs of the property were able to claim what was rightfully theirs.

The neighbors continued to fuss. One lost his orchard. Another lost his creek. One lost the buildings he built. And another lost some valuable pieces of land that he had been farming. But the point is that the original lines were restored. Therefore, the owners claimed what was rightfully theirs.

The Holy Spirit—The Heavenly Surveyor

Many, Many years ago beginning in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ staked out His claim of the Church of Christ. He left His church for each one of us. But down through the years denominations came along and they erected denominational fences. They wrote their denominational creeds. They put up their denominational rituals and church laws until finally people were so confused that no one could find the original church.

That was the situation in the 1700's when the early restorers came on the scene and they said, "What we have to do is go back of the denominationalism. We've got to cut down the brush that has

grown up and has obliterated the original property lines. We've got to go back of the Roman Catholicism. We've got to go all the way back to the original oak stump at Pentecost. We must allow the Holy Spirit, the Heavenly surveyor, to restore the original lines of the church by going back, directly to the pure source of the truth, the Word of God, the foundation of the original church. It was there all the time. You see, what each one of us must make up our minds to do is to restore ourselves to the truth of God's Word, to restore ourselves to the old church that Jesus Himself built on the Day of Pentecost. It is there for us to be a part of. All of its promises are there for us to claim if we are willing to put ourselves into the glorious work of restoration. But to do it properly we must distinguish between things essential and things non-essential. Where the Bible speaks . . . we must be willing to submit ourselves to God's Word in obedience. When the Bible is silent and it's a matter of opinion, we must allow everybody the right to their own opinion. We must not make any church laws governing people when they have a right to their own opinion."