

THE LOOKOUT®

Simply Christians

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WHAT DO you

believe? From one perspective the principle, “no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible,” should be an adequate answer to that question and a sufficient guide to sound doctrine. Because of much confusion in today’s religious world, however, the question deserves a more detailed explanation for those who honestly want to know.

Early History of the Restoration Movement

With roots in the British Isles, the Restoration Movement sprang to life in the United States about the turn of the nineteenth century. The leading pioneer figures were such men as Elias Smith and Abner Jones in New England, James O’Kelly in North Carolina and Virginia, Barton W. Stone in Kentucky, Thomas and Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and Walter Scott in southern Ohio. These men were all dedicated preachers in major denominational bodies.

With little or no contact among most of them, these men and others around them came to believe that a divided church did not conform to the will and Word of God and that human creeds, however correct they might be in substance, perpetuated sectarianism and denominational barriers when they were made tests of fellowship. Our pioneer leaders called people to the simple gospel of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, the right of private judgment in matters of opinion, and the unity of all believers.

This call took many forms: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love.” “Call Bible things by Bible names.” “No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible.” “The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice.” And “We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only.” These statements were more than just clichés. They represented a firm determination to accept the Scriptures as the only authoritative rule, to reject sectarian division, to work for the restoration of the ancient church in faith and practice, and to promote the unity of all believers.

Pennsylvania, to weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper beginning on May 5, 1811. It led to a soul-searching and Bible-studied rejection of infant sprinkling by Alexander Campbell on the occasion of the birth of his first child, followed by the immersion of Thomas and Alexander Campbell in obedience to our Lord’s command on June 12, 1812.

It led the Baptist churches of the Blue River Association in southern Indiana to disband their association in 1821 and unite with the “Christians only.” It led Walter Scott to the development of his simple five-finger exercise on the plan of salvation—faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit and

by David L. Eubanks

Restoration and Unity

Of course, the early pioneers did not know all the directions that the path they had chosen would lead them when they began. It led to the successful promotion of the name “Christian” to the exclusion of sectarian names by Rice Haggard among the Republican Methodists in North Carolina and Virginia in 1794 and the Presbyterians of the Springfield Presbytery in Kentucky in 1804.

It led to the dissolution of the Springfield Presbytery and “union with the body of Christ at large” by Barton W. Stone and others at Cane Ridge on June 28, 1804. It led the Brush Run congregation associated with the Campbells in Washington County,



Simply Christians

eternal life—by which thousands came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ on the Western Reserve in the years 1827-30. It led to the union of the Campbell and Stone branches of the movement in the final days of 1831 and a joint celebration of the Lord's Supper in Lexington, Kentucky, on New Year's Day, 1832, because they held in common the essentials of the faith, in spite of differences over certain matters of opinion.

It sustained the movement through the Civil War without an open split in our ranks, although feelings ran strong among people on both sides of the slavery issue. It allowed people to fellowship together and consider each other brothers and sisters in Christ, while they differed over such matters as the use of organs in worship, paid preachers, closed Communion, missionary societies, and so forth. It led to a "free church" in a "free land" that multiplied twice in the period from the Civil War to 1909, from a movement of 200,000 members to a fast-growing fellowship of nearly 1.5 million people.

Garfield's Statement

Because of the many inquiries that he received concerning the views of this fast-growing movement, President James A. Garfield wrote his classic statement, "What We Stand For."

1. We call ourselves Christians, or Disciples of Christ.
2. We believe in God the Father.
3. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and our Savior. We regard the divinity of Christ as the fundamental truth of the Christian system.
4. We believe in the Holy Spirit, both as to his agency in conversion and as indwelling in the heart of the Christian.
5. We accept both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures as the inspired Word of God.
6. We believe in the future punishment of the wicked and the future reward of the righteous.
7. We believe that the Deity is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God.
8. We observe the institution of the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day. To this table we neither invite nor debar; we say it is the

- Lord's Supper for all of the Lord's children.
9. We plead for the union of God's people on the Bible and the Bible alone.
 10. The Christ is our only creed.
 11. We maintain that all the ordinances should be observed as they were in the days of the Apostles.

During the twentieth century, division occurred within the ranks of the Restoration Movement. This division has had many causes. In some instances, matters of personal preference have been elevated to tests of faith. The silences of Scripture have been used to break fellowship among believers. Others have cast aside the validity of the New Testament as the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice for the church. Denominational respectability has been considered more important than the ancient gospel. In nearly all such cases, sectarian pride has replaced the plea for the unity of the church according to the doctrine of God's Word.

While the Restoration Movement has been hindered by such factors, the Movement has not died. The reason for its persistence may be that it is not, and never has been, a structured organization; it is a free fellowship. Wherever individuals and congregations sincerely follow the New Testament as their only rule of faith and order and practice the principle "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love," the Movement continues to thrive, and congregations are growing.

Barton Warren Stone, 1772-1844

BORN IN COLONIAL MARYLAND, Stone grew up on the frontier in southern Virginia. Converted while in college, he desired to become a Presbyterian minister. He moved to the frontier in Kentucky in 1796 and began ministering to two small churches, one of them at Cane Ridge. The great revival held there in 1801 changed his life and ministry.

Since the Presbyterian leadership opposed the revivals, Stone and others left the Presbyterian organization and briefly formed their own presbytery. Concluding that this organization was also in error, they dissolved their presbytery in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*. This document emphasized their commitment to Christian unity, biblical authority, and the autonomy of the local congregation.

Stone became the leader of a Christian Church movement in the Ohio Valley. Although he had initially good relationships with the Christian Connection of New England/New York, he was more favorably drawn toward union with the members of the Campbell Movement. A unification of Stone and Campbell followers occurred in 1832 as the two movements merged into one fellowship of churches and members. Stone is particularly remembered for his commitment to Christian unity and his conviction that the Bible is the only sure guide for the church.—by Dr. James B. North, professor of church history at Cincinnati Christian University.



In Essentials, Unity

The Fatherhood of God, the Messiahship of Jesus, the facts of the gospel (his death, burial, and resurrection), the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, the importance of biblical names, the divine ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the autonomy of the church are some of the New Testament concepts that keep people united in Christ.

The fundamental truth of Christianity is the Messiahship of Jesus. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord underlies our entire relationship to God. It is the basis for every response in

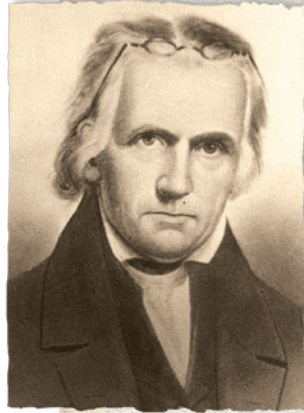
conversion. It is no wonder that when Christ commanded his apostles in Mark 16:15, 16 to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,” he affirmed that “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Faith in Christ as Lord underlies all else. Without it there is only condemnation.

From this perspective of justification by faith it is easier to understand and explain with greater clarity the conversion accounts in the book of Acts. To the Philippian jailer of Acts 16, who probably had never heard of Christ, possibly not even of Jehovah God, but who asked what he must do to be saved, Paul responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (v. 31). Responding in faith, the jailer and his household were baptized the same hour of the night. Years earlier the Ethiopian eunuch had responded to the same message by Philip, the evangelist. Convicted under Philip’s preaching on the Messiahship of Jesus from Isaiah 53, the eunuch asked what prevented his being baptized. He and Philip both then went into the water, and the eunuch was baptized.

Every active response in conversion rests on faith in Christ as the Messiah of God. Acts of obedience are not, as Paul writes in Titus 3:5, “righteous things we had done,” but expressions of faith by which we are justified in Christ and receive God’s grace. Faith is as necessary to repentance as a change of heart, as vital to confession as the movement of the mouth, and as essential to baptism as water. In fact, without it repentance is only an emotional fling, confession mere empty words, and baptism just a simple bath. When we come to God in genuine faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, however, repenting, confessing, and submitting ourselves to him in baptism, through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit we experience the marvelous transformation called the new birth. Paul beautifully describes one facet of this experience when he writes to the Romans, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (10:10).

Thomas Campbell, 1763–1851

CAMPBELL WAS BORN in Northern Ireland and ultimately became a minister there of the Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian Church. He became disillusioned about the church’s narrow views of fellowship and moved to America in 1807. But there he encountered the same views.



He left the Presbyterians in 1809 and formed the Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania), a group committed to church reform based on the authority of the Scriptures. He coined the motto, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” That same year he wrote the influential *Declaration and Address*, a document that continues to enunciate the guiding principles of the Restoration Movement.

This document announces the priority of Christian unity and the evils of church division. It also states that nothing can be made essential to the life of the church unless the Bible makes it essential. All other areas are in the realm of opinions, where liberty and tolerance must be exercised.

Although his son Alexander soon assumed leadership of this group, it was Thomas who first set the direction for the Campbell Movement. Thomas was known as a kindly patriarch who was committed to eliminating divisions among Christians.—*JBN*

Faith is not left back at the first “step” in the plan of salvation; nor is it left in the water when one comes forth from the grave of baptism. The apostasy or falling away against which the author of Hebrews so sternly warns his Christian readers throughout his letter is no less than casting aside faith in Christ. Maintaining trust in him, on the other hand, continues to bring us everything of eternal value. May we treat it preciously, guard it carefully, and keep it faithfully.

In Opinions, Liberty

But what about matters where the Scriptures have not clearly spoken? Such issues should be considered matters of opinion.

An important key to the unity and growth of the Restoration Movement in the nineteenth century was the determination of the Christians who were a part of it to maintain freedom of private opinions. They refused to establish terms of fellowship beyond the clear teachings of the New Testament.

Problems over opinions arose in the church of the New Testament, and the apostle Paul dealt clearly with this

question in such Scriptures as Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23–33; Galatians 4:9–11; 5:1, 13, 14; and Colossians 2:16–22. In these texts he provides us with forceful declarations about freedom of conscience in areas of private judgment and clear lessons on the conduct of believers toward one another over such issues. The great apostle wonderfully joins the twin virtues of freedom and responsibility.

Underlying Paul’s teaching on this subject was the fundamental truth that no human opinion could be joined with the gospel terms as necessary for salvation and the fellowship of the church. To the Galatians and Colossians he affirmed that adding any requirements beyond those he had proclaimed was false doctrine and a denial of justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

The church grows best when the faith is stressed and proclaimed, and opinions are held privately. This truth is vitally needed today.

In All Things, Love

Most of the New Testament teaching on the right of private opinion goes beyond personal matters and treats our re-

sponsibility to others. We are not to please ourselves, but to pursue a course that edifies, harmonizes, and unites. The unity of the church can be maintained when love prevails among us.

Love is served and unity preserved when Christians refrain from judging one another in matters of opinion. Some tend to criticize and condemn those who are inclined toward greater freedom in those areas. Others who are more broad-minded in such matters tend to assume an attitude of sophistication and look down on, even ridicule, more narrow-minded Christians. There is no place for either attitude in the church. The New Testament condemns both the unfair criticism by the scrupulists and the haughty contempt of freer Christians.

When an issue over opinions arises in the church, the solution is not to be found in insistence on agreement on a given view, but insistence on Christian love. Paul's advice is still good: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

Worldwide Evangelism

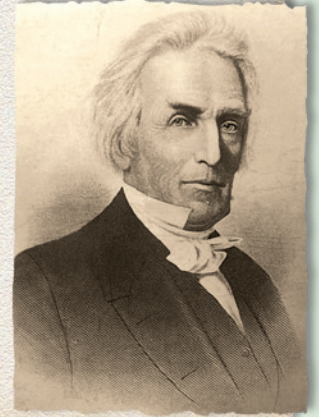
In his great prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers "to let the world know that you sent me" (v. 23). His prayer for unity

Alexander Campbell, 1788–1866

BORN IN NORTHERN IRELAND, Campbell was raised as an Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian and immigrated to America in 1809. Disenchanted by denominational narrowness both in the British Isles and the United States, Alexander joined the movement initiated by his father, Thomas.

His studies on baptism led him to adopt believers' immersion, leading him to join the Baptists in 1815, in spite of the Baptists' orientation toward Calvinism. Friction over the Baptists' unwillingness to accept his views about baptism for the remission of sins led the Campbell Movement to leave the Baptists about 1830.

As editor of the *Christian Baptist* and later the *Millennial Harbinger*, Campbell attacked the traditions of most denominations, and continually tried to restore "the ancient order of things," the patterns of the New Testament church. In his publications, as well as in his five public debates, Campbell became nationally known as an articulate and forceful religious leader. The union with the followers of Stone kept Campbell in position as the primary leader of this composite group. By the time of his death in 1866 the movement he led had national status and scope. By any reckoning, he is considered one of the most dynamic and significant religious leaders of the nineteenth century.—JBN



was a prayer for the world mission of the gospel. He wants his gospel preached in "all the world . . . to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

The belief and practice of the church of the New Testament included witnessing to faith in Christ "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" even if,

at times, the church had to be prodded in that direction. Jesus' commission to his apostles is our commission also: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20). ■

Walter Scott, 1796–1861

BORN IN SCOTLAND and educated at the University of Edinburgh, Scott came to America in 1818. Arriving in Pittsburgh the next year, he came under the influence of a church of Scottish immigrants who were identified with the teachings of Robert and James A. Haldane of Scotland. Here Scott was introduced to the commitment to the New Testament as the primary precedent for church life, as well as the idea of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

After meeting Alexander Campbell in 1822, he and Campbell became lifelong friends. It was Campbell who introduced Scott to the Mahoning Baptist Association in northeastern Ohio. When this group was looking for a full-time evangelist to travel and preach, they hired Scott for the purpose. Here Scott developed a preaching style that focused on the "five-finger exercise," a simple way to explain the gospel. People must believe, repent, be baptized, and they will receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life. This simple evangelistic tool led Scott to baptize approximately 1,000 people a year during an active 30-year ministry. He is mostly remembered for his contribution toward the restoration of apostolic preaching.—JBN



Resources for Further Study

Books:

Marshall Leggett, *Introduction to the Restoration Ideal* (Standard Publishing, 1986).

James B. North, *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Standard Publishing, 1994).

Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Standard Publishing, 1990).

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Why Bother with the Brotherhood?

by Mike Shannon

I really love my church and what it stands for, but I get frustrated over some of the arguments and issues that dominate the discussion in the fellowship of which my church is a part. I want to just be a Christian. Is it really important to affiliate with a particular group of believers? Jesus is most important.

I am a member of the Christian churches and churches of Christ, as are a great number of readers of THE LOOKOUT, so I will answer with reference to my own group.

A Charitable Attitude

While I have something in common with all who love Jesus, I also love the movement of which I am a part. I cannot imagine a scenario in which I would ever leave the Restoration Movement. I must confess that I approach this subject with some degree of prejudice. I am a third-generation Christian church preacher. I have never believed in biting the hand that fed me, and this movement has fed me well. I have never assumed that I had to agree on every single point to be part of a religious group. In fact, one of the things I love about the Restoration Movement is our conviction that you don't have to agree on every point.

When I try to imagine where else I would feel comfortable, I can't think of a group I would rather belong to. Any other group produces more ideas I would disagree with. This does not mean I can't have charitable and profitable relationships with people from other groups, nor does it mean I can't learn something from them now and

then. It means there is no other group I would feel comfortable affiliating with.

A Rich Fellowship

There are several reasons I love this movement. One is the marvelous heritage. I had heard the principles of the movement preached from the pulpit, and when I first read the writings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, I was thrilled. Much of what people protest, I believe, is a third- or fourth-generation corruption of the ideas of the Campbells. Later I delved into the writings of Barton Stone. Although I previously knew about him and what he stood for, I had made no careful study of his ideas in his own words. Once again I was thrilled. His passion for the gospel of Christ and Christian unity jumps off the page and serves as a great motivator. Many of the ideas of the Stone-Campbell movement that were once considered outrageous are now widely accepted in the wider Christian world.

Another reason I will not leave is because of the rich fellowship I enjoy right now. I really like and respect my colleagues in the ministry. Everywhere I go, I find people who care about the lost. I regularly meet ministers both old and young who genuinely want to make a difference in the world and in Christendom. This joy goes beyond the fraternity of preachers. I could list elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, college and seminary professors, and other servants who do remarkable work for the kingdom. They are part of this movement, and I will not desert them.

A Worthwhile Commitment

I will not leave the brotherhood because I still believe in its ideas. We may need a fresh articulation of those ideas, so they may be understood and embraced by a new generation, but the concepts are still valid. What is our brotherhood? We are not united by some denominational structure. We are not united by some human document. Primarily what unites us is our commitment to the cause of Christ, but our unique contributions center around a set of ideas that are precious to us. I will admit, we don't always live up to those ideas. Is there any human enterprise that lives up to its ideas perfectly? I will admit many show little interest in these ideas and others claim to know them but are grossly inaccurate in their understanding of them. Still, I believe in them. I still believe in unity, based on the Bible. I still believe in freedom in matters of opinion. I still believe in the Bible alone as our rule of faith and practice. I still believe that the ordinances, baptism and Communion, should be performed as they were in the days of the apostles.

Those who hold some of these views who belong to other faith groups are not ashamed of these ideas, nor do they apologize for them. I can have some things in common with all who love and embrace our Father, his Son, and his Word. But the Restoration Movement is my home. I will not be dissuaded by those who are sectarian, critical, cynical, or simply uninterested. The Restoration Movement is my home, and I am not planning to move. ■

Mike Shannon is chairman of the practical ministries department at Cincinnati (Ohio) Christian University.

Are You a Christian?

by Gene Appel

IT'S ONE OF THE greatest joys I have in life. Nothing compares to the experience of baptizing people who have become so enamored by the person and work of Jesus Christ that they choose to receive him as their Savior and leader. Their enthusiasm is genuine. Their joy is infectious. Their faith is simple. And their lives and souls are transformed forever.

It happened again today—Mom, Dad, and their 17-year-old son. Contrary to what some skeptics may believe, these people were not weak and in need of a crutch. Nor had they put their brains on the shelf to follow blindly a piece of ancient folklore.

Rather, this educated and professional family had carefully examined the claims and the evidence for the person of Jesus Christ and decided that they wanted to become his followers—Christians. Maybe after your own investigation of Jesus Christ that's what you'll want too.

Some Marks of a Christian

So what is a Christian?

First, a Christian is someone who humbly receives Jesus Christ in the way prescribed in the New Testament.

The Bible says in John 1:12, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Before you can receive Jesus Christ, you first must have an accurate understanding of his basic identity. Some say Jesus was a prophet. Some say he was only a good moral teacher. Some say he was a created being.

The Bible teaches he was God in the

flesh. Jesus was not just a representative of God. He was not just someone who taught about God. Jesus was not just a positive energy force. Jesus was God. He was fully human and fully deity all at the same time (Colossians 2:9).

Additionally the Bible teaches that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for our sin. Remember when you were in school and your teacher was sick, and you'd get a substitute teacher for the day? The substitute teacher took the place of another. When a football player gets injured, a substitute goes into the game for him.

When Jesus died on the cross, he died as our sin substitute. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). We were the ones who deserved to die on the cross for our foul-ups and sins against a holy God, but Jesus died in our place.

His resurrection from the dead verified his claim to be God in the flesh. You can go to the tomb of Confucius, Mohammed, Lenin, or Buddha, and you'll find a body. But go to the tomb of Jesus Christ and it's empty.

When you become a Christian, you are receiving Jesus Christ who was God in the flesh, died as a substitute for your sin, and rose from the dead.

Becoming a Christ follower does not mean you are receiving a particular religious denomination. You are receiving a relationship with God. Neither are you receiving a list of human-made rules to



follow. You are receiving a person you follow.

You are baptized into Christ, not a human organization. You are becoming a Christian. Not a church-ian. Not a denominational-ian. Simply a follower of Jesus Christ.

This decision takes a great deal of humility. Over the years I've watched many people struggle to come to faith in Christ and most of the time the biggest roadblock is not a lack of credible evidence for the identity of Jesus Christ, because there's plenty available for those willing to seriously investigate.

The biggest roadblock is just plain

old-fashioned pride. It's hard to humble yourself and admit you need God in your life and a Savior for your sin.

It's hard for some professional people to say, "I'm a doctor, I'm a professor, I'm a CEO, I'm a business owner, but I still need Jesus Christ."

People who work in the construction trades might say, "I work around some pretty rough people. They'd think I've gone soft." I've been around a lot of construction people in the past year as our church has finished a building project, and I notice they do talk about God and Jesus a lot!

Jesus said it takes the faith of a child to enter the kingdom of God. Humble faith was what a jailer in the town of Philippi was willing to express when confronted by the claims of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30–33). At a desperate moment he asked his prisoners, Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." And immediately he and his family were baptized.

That took humility. He probably feared what the other guards and government officials would say. But in a humbling mo-



ment he received Jesus Christ, God in the flesh who died as a substitute for his sin and rose from the dead.

Second, *a Christian is someone who genuinely repents of his past.*

Receiving Jesus Christ is just the starting point of becoming a Christian.

When a dishonest tax collector named Zacchaeus became a follower of Christ, not only did Jesus extend salvation, but Zacchaeus responded, "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8b). Zacchaeus made a change in his life. He broke from his sinful past and started heading in a new direction.

True repentance says, "With God's help I'm going to do my best to go a new direction, to follow a new compass in my life."

When the people of Jerusalem were cut to the heart over their sin and asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" the first word out of his mouth was "repent" (Acts 2:38).

When a man named Saul, who had persecuted and murdered followers of Christ, became a Christian, he immediately went into synagogues and started telling people about Jesus. He repented.

When the Philippian jailer became a Christian, he immediately demonstrated his repentance by bandaging and tending to the wounds inflicted

only hours before on his prisoners Paul and Silas.

True repentance begins with a conviction and brokenness about sin.

Years ago I walked into a room where our three- and five-year-old daughters were playing. There on the white-carpeted floor was a spilled cup, oozing out some lime-green jelly-like paste. Our girls know they are not supposed to take food or drink onto that carpet. And this was not just any spill. This was a concoction of about three spoonfuls of powdered drink mix for every spoonful of water. So I went to them and asked who did it. They were very mature about it; each said, "*She* did it!"

After further investigation I just had the intuitive sense that I knew which one it was, even though neither of them would admit it. So I went to this particular daughter and turned up the heat. "Honey, did you do this? Now tell Daddy the truth." She just shook her head back and forth sideways. I said, "You're not going to get in trouble if you tell me the truth. There's going to be no time-out. No spanking. I just want to know the truth. Did you do it?" Again, she shook her head no. After about five minutes she finally broke and admitted her sin.

You would think, knowing she wasn't going to get in trouble and her daddy would forgive her, she would tend to just act as if nothing had happened and



go on. But immediately after she came clean, tears started welling up in her eyes. She went to pieces and ran out of the room. Why? Because she was undone by her past. Because she knew she had disappointed her daddy.

That's conviction and brokenness over sin, the beginning of true repentance.

True repentance also involves a sincere change in behavior. Truth be told, this is what keeps many people from receiving Jesus Christ. They just don't want to change.

"But, I'm just kind of a late-night, club-hopping, party guy. I'm just a lady's man, Gene. That's who I am."

"But, you can't survive in business without cutting a few corners, hiding a few things from Uncle Sam here and there. How else could I be competitive?"

Repentance means no more "Buts." Repentance calls for a change.

I got this letter recently from a 21-year-old single mother. I share it with her permission.

Gene, I wanted to write this letter about your sermon, 'The Single and Safe Sex.' Your message touched me in a truly deep place. I am 21 years old and in the process of a divorce. I have two children ages five and two. Obviously I had them at 16 and 18. They have different fathers and that's a long story in itself. I never realized the hurt that I would cause myself when I was falling in love and trying to find acceptance from boys who were more than willing to give me a sense of love.

My heart has been broken and I wish that young girls could feel the hurt I've felt just for five minutes so they could choose to keep themselves pure. I believe that waiting until you're married to have sex can be one of the most trying choices in one's life, but I'm convinced that the payoff would be unimaginable.

I plan to trust God with my life from here on. . . . I want to thank you for your message (no matter how hard it was for me to listen to). I had already made the decision about my sexuality before this message, but it really gave me a sense of optimism.

That's repentance. Brokenness over sin and then a genuine change, walking in a new direction in the grace and freedom of Jesus Christ.

A Christian is someone who humbly receives Jesus Christ, genuinely repents of his past, and third, *openly reflects a transformed life*. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).



When a baby is first born everybody always asks, "Well, who does he look like?" And at first it's hard to tell, because neither parent really looks like a wrinkled up prune!

But over the years kids often start to resemble their parents. People often tell me how much I look like my mom.

As the years go by, and as we are transformed by Jesus Christ, we ought to reflect him more and more. People ought to see the qualities of Christ (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) growing in us.

Some Tools for Transformation

You might be thinking, "I can't do that. I can't change like that. I don't have the power." You're exactly right. You don't, but God does. Here are three ways he is going to help transform your life.

First, with *a transforming book*.

The Bible is unlike any other book you have ever read in your life. Second Timothy 3:16, 17 (*New Living Translation*) says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do."

What other book can make those claims? The Bible can help your faith grow through tough times, understand God's will in confusing times, resist sin in tempting times, and enrich your soul in empty times.

God also has made available to you *a transforming power*.

Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Sometimes people who are thinking about following Christ say, "I can't do that. I can't change my old habits, my language or my behavior." But through the power of his Spirit, God gives you the power to change what you think can't be changed.

Additionally God gives you the opportunity to live in *a transforming community*.

We don't make this transformational journey in isolation. We don't do it by ourselves. God gives us a community of other people transformed by Christ. This is the church.

In Acts 2 we discover 3,000 people humbly receiving Jesus Christ and genuinely repenting of their past. It says, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They

devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (v. 42).

The chapter goes on to describe how they were doing this in large-group meetings (in the temple courts) and small-group meetings (breaking bread in their homes). They found themselves drawn together as brothers and sisters because of their common faith in Jesus Christ.

A Christian is someone who humbly receives Jesus Christ, genuinely repents

of his past, and openly reflects a transformed life.

So ask yourself, "Am I a Christian?"

The cross of Jesus Christ (who was God in the flesh, died as our sin substitute, and rose from the dead) is the place where every sin, every wrong decision, every regret we have in life can be erased.

Anyone, no matter what you've done, can become a follower and completely forgiven and freed from your past, but it's up to you to receive him, repent

and be baptized, and allow yourself to be transformed by his book, his power, and his people.

You can go to the airport, walk to the gate, and believe that the plane can take you to Hawaii or wherever it is you want to go, but until you step onto the plane, it can't take you anywhere. You have to take the step to get on board.

Nobody can become a Christian for you.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). ■

Gene Appel is senior minister of Eastside Christian Church in Fullerton, California.

God gives you the power to change what you think can't be changed.

Just Christians, Just Enough

by Mark Taylor

CHECK THE "CHURCHES" listing in any city's Yellow Pages, and you'll find a confusing mess. Page after page of names will assault you, many of them too long to fit on one line. Why so many labels? Why so many differences? Who's responsible for this division? If all of these churches are really seeking the same God, why must they take so many different paths to find him?

Part of the answer is cultural. We live in a day when people demand choices, and this isn't all bad. Large church. Small church. Urban church. Country church. Pipe organ and hymns. Guitars and choruses. Each appeals to a different crowd. Each can reach some people who might otherwise ignore the message. Each is a matter of style, not substance. We can feel good about much of this variety.

But this is only the beginning. Part of the answer is theological. Interview the

ministers in your town, and you'll find doctrinal differences too crucial to be compromised. Who was Jesus? What is the Bible? Why do we live, and what about life after this one? Surely conflicting answers to these questions can't all be right. People cannot worship together if they cannot agree about whom they're seeking, and why.

Some of the differences are historical. Doctrinal disagreements centuries ago have been magnified and calcified through two millennia until today. And now many whose families have been in church for generations cannot turn away from the opinions and traditions of their forefathers.

Many, but not all. Some have decided that man-made labels to categorize Christians are not good or necessary. Some have decided that "Christian" is the only ID a follower of Christ needs.

Some have decided to turn away from centuries of ecclesiastical maneuvering and denominational bickering to be "just Christians."

You can count the writers and editors of THE LOOKOUT among that number. In fact, this magazine comes from a whole company dedicated to the idea that "just a Christian" is just enough. It's not surprising that this special issue is dedicated to this theme, because it has been Standard Publishing's goal for more than 13 decades.

We challenge you to decide what you want to call yourself, and why. We believe we will all grow closer to Christ—and to each other—if we will settle for his name alone. Can any of us suggest a good reason why we need anything more? ■

Mark Taylor is editor of Christian Standard in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Restoration Movement in the 21st Century

by Robin Underhill

ONE WEDNESDAY NIGHT in the early 1980s the choir director of our church in southern Indiana suggested we learn an appropriate hymn for a special occasion. She was surprised that only a couple of us knew it. We told her that it must have only been popular with the Free Methodists, her church heritage. That instigated a rather entertaining conversation about the differences in our individual church histories. Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians—only five out of 20 of us had been in a Christian church or church of Christ all of our lives. A few had become Christians later in life and had little or no previous church experience. We realized we were not the only Christians, but we appreciated being part of a church that invited us to be “Christians only.”

I have spent 44 years in Restoration Movement churches, although I cannot remember the first few years very well. In all of my church experiences we gathered from a variety of Christian heritages. At our present church in Maryland, Catholics, Baptists, long-time-out-of-church people, and not-ever-really-in-church people are filling the pews. Our preacher and others have commented about how often they hear statements like “I have been looking for a church like this for a long time.” People are attracted to congregations that are committed to being “Christians only,” and they appreciate biblical authority for the church’s doctrines and practices.

Searching for Truth

The historic plea of the Restoration Movement is still as attractive as Jesus’

prayer for the unity of his disciples in John 17.

While many churches are reaching “seekers,” some older members are concerned about changes that seem to downplay the historic strengths of the movement. I, too, have concerns, but I am encouraged to see that members of the next generation appreciate the ideas and emphases of the Restoration Movement.

One of my college students wrote, “It may turn people off to tell them about joining a movement, but they will surely find the principles attractive and Jesus and his church [attractive]. . . . I am driven on by the prayer of Jesus in John 17.” Sometimes in the closing hours of a class I teach on the history of the Restoration Movement, the students express frustration because their congregation did not teach them about the history and mission of the church. Other students, from a different church heritage, criticize those of us who are “Christians only” because we have not put more effort into teaching and demonstrating our plea for unity and biblical authority.

Another student wrote, “If Jesus prayed for this [that his disciples would be one], why can’t we think of it as possible? . . . If we find people who have passion for the movement’s message of hope and truth, the church could be changed forever.”

These 20-somethings and their younger siblings have grown up in a postmodern there-is-no-truth environment. Yet they are still looking for truth and a church that is secure enough to say, “The Bible is the Word of God.”

These young people may be, in the words of John Piper, “not too impressed with the user-friendly God of their parents.” They say to their friends, “What you need is to be blown away by the holiness of Almighty God.”

Biblical Answers

A similar generational tension existed in the 1960s. One philosopher referred to the unrest and desperation of the ‘60s as “a search for the sacred.” (That may not be exactly how you remember it.) The unrest appeared to be about freedom and love, but I think it was about disappointment. Where was the church? Finding little of religious significance going on in the mainline churches, and other churches answering questions no one was asking, many began to think the answers to their questions were best found in psychology and sociology.

Many members of today’s generation, however, are highly motivated by compassion and community so they are naturally drawn to Jesus and his church. They are looking for and expecting biblical answers. They ask hard questions. One of my students inspired me with the idea that the “Restoration Movement needs to stay confused and tense enough to be humble. . . . Once you think you have it figured out, the tendency is to be critical of those who haven’t.” Another student said, “We need to stop trying to bring people from other congregations into ‘our churches.’ Once they have a grasp of New Testament Christianity, leave them where they are so they can teach others.”

Experiencing Something Special

In a world of religious division, spiritual confusion, and competing theologies, it is not only possible to be just a Christian—it is preferable. An emphasis on unity and biblical authority is refreshing to the frustrated seeker. We enjoy a heritage of biblical preaching at a time when the next generation is hungry for the truth. Preaching the Bible is still effective. It will always be effective. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are personally

meaningful and teach the gospel incredibly well to a generation that wants to experience something special with God.

In *Christianity Today* (February 3, 1997) millennial kids described the worship service they prefer. After hearing someone preach from the Bible (“the sermon is to the point and only 15 minutes long”) the members of the congregation pray for one another. They take Communion. But first “a chapter from the Bible is read out loud so the people understand what they are really doing

when taking Communion. Then Christians only partake. . . .”

Here is a summary statement from the next generation of church leaders: We in the Restoration Movement are either going to fragment ourselves into disintegration or teach with grace the plea of the movement. These young leaders are expecting the church to flourish. ■

Robin Underbill is assistant professor of history at the University of Delaware, Georgetown campus.

Keeping the Dream Alive

by David Faust

GOLDILOCKS HAS A LOT of company. In the search for a church, you may have discovered that some churches seem too hard—they bash and bruise people with the truth. Others seem too soft—they love people, but don't teach God's Word with conviction and power. Where can you find a church that's “just right”?

No perfect congregations exist this side of Heaven. But we can still dream! By faith we can see the church's potential as well as its problems. We can see the church as it is, but also dream about what the church can become by the power of God.

Let's face it. Too often Christians have separated into quarrelsome factions and sects, though Jesus prayed for our unity. We've crystallized our theological opinions into tests of orthodoxy, though Jesus warned not to replace God's commands with man-made traditions. We've quarreled over petty issues when we should have been reaching out to a lost world. We've treated the church like a political organization or a social club instead of acting like the body of Christ. Leaders have engaged

in power-plays instead of shepherding the flock with humility and love. We've turned our backs on each other when we should have been serving Christ shoulder-to-shoulder.

So what should we do? Throw up our hands in despair and give up on the church?

No. If we love Jesus, we can't give up on the church. Christ is the foundation, the head, the Savior and Lord of his church. Even when it's flawed and struggling, it's his church, the one he promised to build (Matthew 16:18).

It's our church, too. Sinners saved by grace, we are knit together by God's Spirit into “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9).

What is the Restoration Movement? On one level, it's about lofty ideals like unity and truth. But it's also the exciting down-to-earth story of ordinary people who love the Lord, serve those in need, plant new churches, send missionaries throughout the world, and feed the flock of God. Sometimes we refer to the movement as a “plea”—a passionate call for Christians to return

to basic biblical practices like the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). Regrettably, sometimes the movement hasn't appeared to “move” at all. We've acted as if our forefathers completed the task and we can simply rest on their accomplishments.

But the work of restoration is ongoing, and it's more than just a set of ideas. God's goal is restoring people. He wants to restore our souls (Psalm 23:3). He calls us to gently restore others caught in sin (Galatians 6:1). When we're faithful in this work, “the God of all grace” promises to restore us and make us “strong, firm, and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10).

This isn't just our history. It's our mission: the restoration of lost people and the ongoing reformation of the church so we can accomplish the task. These ideals need to be understood, embraced, explained, and passed along to future generations.

Keep the dream alive. ■

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