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INTRODUCTION

- A. Those who have a general knowledge of churches of Christ today are aware of the fact that a division took place during the last half of the 20th century.
 1. This division came about over doctrinal issues concerning the organization and mission or work of the church.
 2. In many respects, this division reflected many of the same issues that divided the church during the latter half of the 19th century that resulted in two distinct groups—the Christian Church and churches of Christ.
 - a. In the ensuing years, the Christian Church itself has suffered a division, with the more liberal element identified as the Disciples of Christ, and the more conservative element identified as the Independent Christian Church.
 - b. In a convention of the Disciples group some years ago, they acknowledged, “We are a denomination, and we might as well admit it, and get on with the business of being a denomination.”
- B. Some may wonder why it takes 50 years for a division to become complete.
 1. There are some issues that brethren must take time to study.
 2. There are ties of friendship and brotherhood that are slow to be broken.
 - a. My father went to school with many preachers that ended up on the other side, but who often worked together in meetings in their younger years.
 - b. I knew these men, as they were in my parents’ home, and I in theirs.
 - c. But now my children have no association with these men, thus in the third generation the lines of division are pretty clearly drawn.
- C. Sadly, bitterness and wild charges often accompany division.
 1. Conservative brethren were oft called “orphan-haters” and “anti-cooperation,” thus were labeled as “antis.”
 - a. This is the same appellation that was given to those who were opposed to instrumental music and missionary societies in the 19th century.
 2. “While there are a few places where ‘anti-ism’ is still a real threat to the true faith, it is generally of no consequence. Isolated little groups of ‘antis’ still meet; but they are withering away and are having no appreciable effect on the brotherhood at large.” This speaker went on to say that this “false doctrine” was “antagonistic to clear Bible teaching,” and the “typical ‘anti’ usually cut his own throat by his arrogant and malicious acts and statements” and was “quick to draw a line of fellowship and exclude himself from the larger portion of our brotherhood.” (Reubel Shelley, F.-H. Lectures, 1970)
 3. Nine years later Ira North, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* estimated that the “antis” composed 5% of the churches, and pleaded with them to “come back home...to the old paths...and preach again in the great churches,” claiming that “anti doctrine cannot build great churches, inspire missionaries, and encourage pure and undefiled religion.”
 4. A college professor argued that those who believe that Christians could “visit the fatherless and widows by taking them in your home” have “taken the narrow, crooked pig-path of radicalism.”
 - a. Is that a “radical” statement, or what?
- D. In this lesson we want to take a look at the past and see where we are today.

1. I acknowledge the research of Homer Hailey, Steve Wolfgang, Ed Harrell and others, which was of great help in preparing this material.
1. Steve Wolfgang wrote a tract several years ago that contained much of this material

I. THE BIBLE AND APOSTASY

- A. The Old Testament period was full of apostasy.
 1. Prophecies were made even before they entered into the promised land. Deut.31:19-21
 - a. The people prospered, grew fat and indifferent, and fell away.
 2. Time and time again we have the story repeated—a period of faithful service, apostasy, oppression, repentance, restoration, etc.
 3. Finally, God’s patience ran out, and Israel was no more.
- B. New Testament history presents a similar picture.
 1. Once more many warnings were given about departures from the truth.
 - a. Paul’s charge to the Ephesian elders. Acts 20:28-30
 - b. Paul’s warning to Timothy. I Tim. 4:1-2
 - c. The warning in Hebrews 3:12.
 2. Within the 2nd century we see the trend beginning in the development of the hierarchal system that culminated in the Catholic system with a pope
 - a. This began in the local church with one elder becoming predominant, and then the presiding elders in churches in a given area forming a council.
 - b. Within this area, one elder came to preside, who then joined with presiding elders in other areas, obviously leading to a supreme bishop or pope.
 - (1) This is a clear departure from Biblical directives. I Pet. 5:1-2
 3. Although there is evidence of small, persecuted groups following the New Testament order through the centuries, they were scattered and isolated.
 - a. These centuries are called the Dark Ages, with more than one application.

II. THE 19TH CENTURY—THE BEGINNING OF RESTORATION

- A. The 16th Century sees the start of efforts to “reform” the Roman Catholic Church.
 1. The Church had grown in power and corruption, and in many respects came to rule much of the civilized world.
 2. Augustine, born in 354, is considered the “Father of Roman Catholicism,” and formulated a doctrine that greatly contributed to the political power of the church, which gave the pope authority over even kings and emperors.
 3. In commenting on this matter, Alexander Allen says:

“The church was here by divine appointment, and if so it was the divine will that all men should come into it; and if they would not come of themselves, they must be forced to do so; and if the church lacked the power of compulsion, it was the sacred duty which the state owed to the church to come to its rescue, and by the might of the sword ‘compel them to come in,’ that the church might be filled.” (V. G. Allen Alexander, *The Continuity of Christian Thought*, pp. 152, 153)
 4. Luther, Huss, Zwingle, Calvin rebelled not only against the corruption in the church, but also against its political power.

- a. These efforts began in earnest in the early 1500s.
 - b. But their efforts fell short in that they sought merely to reform a corrupt system, rather than to return to the original pattern.
 - c. This culminated in the formation of a multitude of denominational bodies, which we have as their legacy today.
- B. Beginning around 1800, we see serious efforts being made at restoring the ancient order of things.
1. Much has been written about the important work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell in this matter, but there were several who had a great influence in this great movement.
 2. Around 1793, James O’Kelly and others left their Methodist conference when their efforts to restrict the power of the clergy were not accepted.
 - a. They formed what they called “The Republican Methodists” in Virginia.
 - b. In a formal meeting on August 4th, 1794, Rice Haggard stood up with a New Testament in his hand, and said, “Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called *Christians*, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.”
 - c. In 1801 they discarded their bylaws, and accepting the New Testament as their only guide, assumed the name “The Christian Church.”
 3. Around the same time, Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New Hampshire, left the Baptist Church and became pioneers in the search for undenominational Christianity.
 4. Meanwhile, in Kentucky, Barton W. Stone was on his own journey.
 - a. Ordained a Presbyterian minister, he began preaching in Cane Ridge, KY. in 1798.
 - b. He already had misgivings about the Confession of Faith, and began his break with Presbyterianism at the “Great Revival” at Cane Ridge in 1801.
 - c. Stone’s movement had a great influence in the return to Bible-based Christianity.
- C. The work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell
1. Thomas Campbell was born in Ireland in 1763, and was ordained as a minister in the Seceder Presbyterian Church.
 - a. Thomas came under the influence of the followers John Glas, a Scot who introduced weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, a plurality of elders in each congregation, and the principle that the Scripture is the only standard of both doctrine and practice.
 - b. For health reasons, Thomas came to America in 1807.
 - c. Shortly after his arrival, he was asked to preach for a Seceder church near Pittsburgh.
 - d. His views on the Lord’s Supper offended some, and he was subsequently tried for heresy by the Presbyterian Synod.
 - e. He left the Presbyterian Church, but continued to preach to a group of people who, like him, looked for freedom from sectarian narrowness, a closer walk with God, and a union based upon Scriptures.
 - f. At one of the meetings of these people, Campbell spoke at length about the

desire for unity among all believers based upon the Scriptures, and made what has become a well-known statement concerning the rule they would follow: "That rule, my highly respected hearers, is this, that where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

- g. This statement had a tremendous effect upon the religious thinking of the nation in the ensuing years.
2. The "Declaration and Address."
 - a. Realizing the need to make his views of Scripture clear, Thomas delivered his famous "Declaration and Address" on Sept. 7, 1809.
 - b. The entire document filled 54 pages and was a masterpiece of reasoning from the Scriptures.
 - c. W. E. Garrison summed up the major points in this address:

"...first, that the will of Christ included the revelation and imposition of a definite doctrinal and ecclesiastical program. Second, that the Scriptures give an inerrant report of the teaching of Jesus and His apostles and the procedure of the church of the first century, so that any verse in the New Testament could be quoted with perfect assurance of its historical accuracy...Third, that the teaching authority of Jesus had passed over undiminished to the apostles, so that both the injunctions and the examples of the apostles possessed complete authority over the church for all time, that their teachings were as the commands of God, and that the practice of the church of the apostolic age constituted a pattern which the church must permanently follow." (Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier*, pp. 95, 96)
3. Shortly before the "Declaration and Address," in 1809, Alexander and his mother and sisters arrived,
 - a. Alexander had already been influenced towards reformation by men in England and Ireland, and happily found similar thinking in his father.
 - b. In 1810 a meeting house was built in Brush Run, PA, and by the following year these brethren formally organized themselves into an independent congregation, soon realizing that their attempts to identify themselves with any denominational group was fraught with failure.
4. Following the principles set forth by his father, Alexander soon realized that he had not been baptized scripturally, for the Presbyterians did not immerse.
 - a. Soon the whole family was immersed, and in a short time, nearly the whole congregation was made up of immersed believers.
 - b. This event was the occasion of the change in leadership from father to son.
 - c. The father had enunciated the principles, and the son recognized the full implications of the principles and put them into practice.
5. Alexander began publishing *The Christian Baptist* in 1823, which had a wide influence.
 - a. He also had several highly regarded debates, and was even honored to be able to address the U. S. Congress on one occasion.
 - (1) In his 1843 debate with Presbyterian H. L. Rice in Lexington, KY, the

- noted Henry Clay presided as chairman over the two weeks debate.
- b. His famous *Sermon on the Law* in 1816 had caused much prejudice among the Baptists with whom had been associated, and this reflected a general ignorance of denominational preachers concerning the Bible and the distinctions between the Old and New Testaments.
6. Alexander and Barton W. Stone met for the first time in 1824, and by 1832 the two groups had joined forces, recognizing they were on common ground.

IV. THE SPREAD OF THE “CHRISTIANS ONLY” PLEA – 1830-1949

- A. A new publication: *The Millennial Harbinger*
 1. Campbell wanted to expand the scope of his paper, and felt that the name “*Christian Baptist*” could be misconstrued.
 2. Though somewhat milder in tone, the new publication did not hesitate to wage war against the denominational departures of his day.
 3. It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Alexander Campbell’s writing, preaching and debating through these crucial years.
- B. The spread of the plea was rapid and widespread.
 1. The work of the Campbells, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott John Smith and others resulted in possibly 200,000 who were followers of the ancient gospel by 1839.
 2. The causes of this growth were rooted in the zeal of the believers.
 - a. “How is such a rapid growth, with no societies, no machinery, no central head or headquarters, to be accounted for? The answer is: They had a message, they believe their message to be the greatest discovery of the age and need of the world; hence, fired with the zeal of discoverers, they became propagandists of the first rank.” (Homer Hailey, *Attitudes and Consequences*, p. 93)
- C. Dark clouds appear on the horizon.
 1. As brethren rejoiced in their newfound faith and love, they began to meet together to meet and edify one another.
 2. In 1831 Alexander Campbell published four articles on “Cooperation.”
 - a. He pointed to the obligation resting upon the church to evangelize the world.
 - b. Whereas their plea was that any work done by the church should be done through the local congregations, they were discussing *how* the work should be done.
 3. As the movement continued to grow, there was a growing sentiment for a stronger organized force than the cooperation meetings.
 4. Some voices were raised in opposition, not to the meetings per se, but to the consequences of the more organized state meetings that were developing.
 5. Aylett Raines, writing in the *Christian Teacher* strongly opposed these meetings,
 - a. “He believed there were tendencies, which, unless checked, would lead to state organizations and to a ‘United States organization of the congregations’ which would be a dangerous consolidation of power” (Alonzo Willard Fortune, *The Disciples in Kentucky*, p. 166)

b. The subsequent years have proven his fears well founded.

V. 1849—THE BEGINNING OF THE END

A. The American Christian Missionary Society

1. In 1849, Campbell published five articles entitled “Church Cooperation.”
2. A general meeting was held in Cincinnati October 24-28, which culminated in the forming of *The American Christian Missionary Society*, with Campbell elected as its first president, although he was hampered by age and feebleness.
 - a. Accounts of the meeting give the number of those present as 155 delegates representing 110 churches and ten states.
3. This was determined to be a voluntary cooperation of churches that would send funds to the organization, which would in turn select and send our preachers, but in time it came to exercise quite a bit of persuasive power.

B. From the very first, there were strenuous objections to the society.

1. Among the objections was this: “It was said that the Book of God knows nothing of a confederation of churches in an ecclesiastical system, culminating in an earthly head, for government or for any other purpose... It was a dangerous precedent, a departure from the principles for which we have always contended...” (Archibald McLean, *The Foreign Missionary Society*, p. 20).
2. Indeed, more than once Alexander Campbell’s earlier statements were used against him, as in the early years his arguments against such a structure were very clear.
3. Although there was much discussion and disagreement concerning the Society, It did not result in a break of fellowship at that time.

C. As 1860 came into view, there was another troubling issue that arose—the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship.

1. As the number of disciples grew, there were more and more who came from the denominations who held not the same convictions as the early reformers did.
2. Thus there were two attitudes that were prevalent:

“There were those who believed the church should move on with the rest of the world and adapt the spirit of the New Testament to conditions that were ever changing. They held that, when not forbidden by the New Testament, they were free to adapt their program to changing needs. On the other hand, there were those who believed the matter of the church was fixed for all time, and the fact that certain things were not sanctioned was sufficient ground for rejecting them. The men on both sides were equally honest, but they had a different approach to these issues that were raised.” (Fortune, pp. 364, 365)
3. As early as 1827, resolutions forbidding instrumental music and the title “Reverend” had been stated, and the instruments had no significant backing.
4. But in 1858 or 1859, L. L. Pinkerton introduced a melodeon in the worship at Midway, Kentucky.
5. The storm over this innovation reached full fury by 1864, but the aged Alexander Campbell weighed in against the instruments with strong words in an article he penned in 1851, charged that the use of instruments were an appeal to the carnal nature men as practiced in the denominations.
 - a. “I wonder not, then, that an organ, a fiddle, or a Jews-harp, should be requisite to stir up their carnal hearts, and work into ecstasy their animal

- souls...and that all persons who have no spiritual discernment, sympathies of renewed hearts, should call for such aids, is but natural.”
- b. He further stated that “to all spiritually-minded Christians, such aids would be as a cow bell in a concert.” (*Millennial Harbinger*, 1851, pp. 581, 582)
6. One of the major arguments in favor of the instrument is just that the Scriptures do not forbid it.
 7. But this argument flies in the face of the very principles upon which Campbell, Stone and others sought to restore the ancient gospel.
 8. In time, the use of the instrument became more and more widespread, and bitter division took place, as those in favor of the instrument and societies forced others out of their buildings and out of fellowship.
 - a. There were occasions when those opposed to the instruments actually took an ax and chopped up the organ, but this did not stem the tide.
- D. By the turn of the century, the lines were pretty well drawn, and the division was all but complete.
1. In the 1906 U. S. Census, churches of Christ and the Christian Church were recognized as separate entities—no longer one band of disciples.