

Campbellism and the Church of Christ

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Part One

The Restoration Movement

The “Restoration” Movement began in the 19th century under the leadership of Thomas Campbell, Barton Stone, Walter Scott and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866).

The importance of these “Restorers” was based on their claim that:

1. The Christian Church disappeared in the first century. The “true” Gospel was lost at that time.
2. The Roman Catholic Church and all Protestant Churches are apostate organizations, and are not to be viewed as “Christian” churches.
3. All the historic creeds and confessions are worthless and should be ignored.
4. God raised up Alexander Campbell to “restore” the “true” Gospel and to re-establish the Christian Church. He restored the pure “Apostolic” Church.
5. The Millennium was going to be ushered in during their lifetime by the “Restoration” Movement.
6. The “true” Gospel teaches that “baptism unto remission of sins” is essential for salvation. The “Restorers” spoke of this as “baptismal regeneration.”
7. The “baptism” given by all other churches is not saving. You have to be re-baptized in accordance with the Campbellite doctrine of baptism to be saved.
8. Only Bible names should be used in the name of a church. It is wrong to use such names as Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, etc. Even though they first called themselves “Reformed Baptists,” they later took up such names as “Disciples of Christ,” “the Churches of Christ” and “The Christian Church.”
9. Nothing should be allowed in the Church unless there is a “book, chapter and verse” for it. On this basis the “Reformers” were opposed to the use of musical instruments in worship, missionary societies, etc. This point has led to thousands of church fights and splits. The “Churches of Christ” split off from the “Disciples of Christ” over such issues, and have never stopped splitting since that time.
10. Some Campbellite theologians have denied the omniscience of God by teaching that God does not know the future. (For example see *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, by T.W. Brents, published by the Gospel Advocate Company in Nashville, Tennessee).

Significant Dates in Campbellite History:

- 1809: Thomas Campbell censured by the Presbyterian Church for false teaching.
- 1809: Thomas Campbell writes “Declaration and Address” for the “The Christian Association of Washington.” It functioned as a “creed” for the young movement.
- 1809: Alexander Campbell arrives in America and joins his father’s association.

- 1811: The Association becomes an independent church after being rejected by the Presbyterians once again.
- 1812: The Campbells are re-baptized by a Baptist preacher at Buffalo Creek. This was 15 years before Scott originated the doctrine of “baptism unto remission of sins.”
- 1813: The Campbells join the Redstone Baptist Association.
- 1820: Alexander Campbell represents the Baptist Church in a debate with John Walker; a Presbyterian.
- 1823: August: The Redstone Baptist Association prepares to censure the Campbells for false doctrine but they resign and set up an independent Baptist Church.
- 1823: October: Alexander Campbell debates McCalla, still claiming to represent Baptists. The Campbells now call themselves “Reformed Baptists.”
- 1827: November: Walter Scott preaches “baptism unto remission of sins.” William Amen was the first one “baptized unto remission of sins.” Scott’s followers call themselves the “Christians.”
- 1832: Campbell’s “Disciples of Christ” openly unite with Scott’s “Christians.”
- 1849: Controversy over missionary societies splits the “Restoration” Movement.
- 1860: Controversy over musical instruments splits the movement.
- 1906: The Churches of Christ listed as a separate denomination apart from the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Church. The Campbellites popularize Scott’s doctrine of “baptism unto remission of sins.”
- 1920: Over a hundred controversies split the movement on such issues as musical instruments, head coverings, communion cups, schools, orphanages, Sunday School, divorce, re-marriage, etc.

Part Two

The Campbellite Origin of the Major Cults

I. Campbellism and Mormonism

The evidence is clear that Mormonism arose out of the Campbellite “Restoration” Movement.

1. The leading figures in early Mormonism were originally preaches in Campbellite churches, and many of them had personally worked with Alexander Campbell: Sidney Rigdon, Parley Pratt, Oliver Crowder, Orson Hyde, Lyman Wight, Edward Partridge, John Corril, Isaac Morely, John Murdock, etc.
2. So many thousands of “Disciples of Christ” joined the Mormons that Alexander Campbell called Mormonism “Satan’s counterfeit” of the Disciples of Christ
3. Joseph Smith was taught the “Restoration” concept and its peculiar doctrines by Sidney Rigdon. When Joseph Smith adopted most of the points of the “Restoration” Movement, he put himself as the “Restorer” of the Gospel and the Church in the place of Alexander Campbell.
 - a. The Church and the “true” Gospel were lost in the first century.
 - b. All subsequent churches are apostate.
 - c. Joseph Smith “restored” the Church and the Gospel.

- d. A church should use Bible names. The Mormons first called themselves the “Church Christ.” Most Mormon denominations still use such names.
- e. You must be baptized “unto remission of sins” by a Mormon priest to be saved.
- f. Smith challenged Alexander Campbell to a public debate on the issue of who was the true “Restorer.”

Bibliography

- 1. Mormon Sources:
History of the Church (by Joseph Smith) vol. I:120-125, 188. vol. II:268, 269n, 270.
Journal of Discourses, vol. II:17, 18; vol. XI:3.
 Joseph Smith: An American prophet (by John Evans) 211, 214-216.
- 2. Anti-Mormon Scholars:
Shadow or Reality (by the Tanners) pp. 66-68.
Origin of Campbellism (by J. Milburn)
- 3. Campbellite Sources:
Memoirs of Alexander Campbell, vol. II:344-347

II. Campbellism and Christadelphianism

Dr. John Thomas, a prominent “Disciple of Christ” and personal friend of Alexander Campbell, decided that if we should throw out the creeds and use only Bible names, then why should we believe in the Trinity? He went on to deny the deity of Christ, the personhood of the Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Christ, Christ’s physical return to this world and the immortality of the soul. He taught “soul sleep” and denied the doctrine of Hell. He did not believe in a paid clergy, but each member was viewed as a minister.

He was able to persuade many other “Disciples” to join him in establishing the “Christadelphians,” or “Brethren in Christ.” His movement was composed of Campbellite and Millerite churches.

Bibliography

Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature (by McMclintock and Strong), vol. XI:937-938.

III. Campbellism and Jehovah’s Witnessess

Benjamin Wilson was a “Disciple of Christ” who followed Dr. Thomas into Christadelphianism. Although he never studied Greek, he published a Greek-English interlinear call the *The Emphatic Diaglott*.

It was Wilson who introduced Charles Taze Russell to those very doctrines which have become the central theology of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Watchtower

Society even published and used Wilson's interlinear for many years. Campbellism through Christadelphianism is the origin of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature (by McClintock and Strong), vol. XI:937-938; vol. XIII: 868-869.
Apostles of Denial (Ed Gruss) pp. 14-16, 193-196.

Part Three

The Doctrinal Errors of Campbellism

While there are many doctrinal issues that divide the evangelical from the Campbellite, the greatest point of controversy is their view of baptism. The evangelical believes that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Human works such as baptism, church membership, etc., are not necessary for salvation. While obedience to God's Law has a role to play in assurance of salvation, it has no role to play in salvation. Baptism, like circumcision, is an outward rite which symbolizes an inner state. While both ceremonies symbolize regeneration, they do not accomplish it.

In opposition to evangelical doctrine, Campbellite theology teaches "baptismal regeneration." It is claimed that water baptism by immersion of adults only unto remission of sins does not merely symbolize regeneration, but it actually accomplishes it. Faith is not enough. Obedience to God's Law must also take place, or salvation is not possible. Unless you are baptized in the exact way they dictate (immersion, adults only), for the exact purpose they have in mind (unto remission of sins), and by the right person (a Campbellite preacher), not only is your baptism invalid but you are not yet saved no matter how sincerely you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior!

To add baptism to faith is nothing more than adding works to grace, which is impossible according to [Rom. 11:6](#). The attempt to evade this by claiming that baptism is part of faith is not linguistically or grammatically possible. If obedience to God's commands such as baptism is what "faith" is, then why stop with baptism? What about all the other commands of God, such as "love your wife"? A works-salvation can never say when enough works have been done!

The Reasons Why Baptism Is Not Essential for Salvation

1. If the Campbellite doctrine is true, then the Restorers were not saved men! Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott and Barton Stone were never baptized "unto the remission of sin." While they repudiated their infant baptism when they were baptized by the Baptists, they never repudiated their infant baptism when they were baptized by the Baptists, they never repudiated their Baptist baptism and were re-baptized according to Campbellite baptism.
2. Jesus never baptized anyone. If baptism is essential for salvation, then Jesus never saved anyone.
3. Paul did not view baptism as part of the Gospel ([1 Cor: 1:14-17](#)).

4. John's baptism did not save anyone, even though it was "unto remission of sins" ([Mk.1:4](#); cf. [Acts 19:1-5](#)).
4. Since there is only one God, there is only one way of salvation ([Rom 3:28-30](#)). This means that whatever is necessary for salvation today was also necessary during O.T. times.
6. The Gospel of justification by faith alone apart from obedience to God's commands is taught in both O.T. and the N.T. ([Rom 1:1-2](#)).
Abraham: before the Law ([Rom 1:1-2](#)).
David: after the Law ([Rom. 4:6-8](#))
Habakkuk: in the Prophets ([Rom. 1:17](#))
7. Baptism is the N.T. parallel of circumcision, just as the Lord's Supper is the parallel of the Passover ([Col. 2:11-12](#)). Since circumcision was not essential for salvation, then neither is baptism.
8. Abraham was saved before he was circumcised in order to emphasize that salvation was by faith alone apart from obedience to God's commands, and that the Gentiles would be saved by faith alone apart from obedience to any command such as baptism ([Rom. 4:9-11, 16, 23-5:2](#)).
9. Cornelius was saved and baptized by the Holy Spirit before he was baptized ([Acts 10:44-48](#)). This passage clearly refutes baptismal regeneration.
10. Baptismal regeneration:
 - a) makes salvation depend on the availability of water
 - b) makes salvation depend on the availability of a Campbellite preacher
 - c) confuses the symbol with the reality
 - d) makes faith and obedience the same thing
 - e) is based on a superstitious and magical view of baptism.
11. The thief on the cross was saved without baptism. The Campbellite argument that he was saved under the O.T. way of salvation is not possible, seeing that Christ had already died on the cross and finished the atonement before the thief died. The thief belongs on the N.T. side of the cross, and not on the O.T. side.
12. Campbellites claim that the word "unto" in [Acts 2:38](#) (*eis* in the Greek always means "in order to obtain," and is always "forward looking." In this way they make remission of sins follow the act of baptism in a cause and effect relationship. Baptism causes forgiveness of sins.

The problem with this idea is that Greek scholars do not see this as the meaning of "eis." Liddell and Scott, Thayer, A.T. Robertson, Dana and Manty, Vine, etc. state that "eis" is often used in the sense of "in reference to something already previously existing or accomplished." In this sense, baptism is done after and

because of remission of sins. Once your sins are forgiven, then you should be baptized.

That the Greek scholars are correct is seen from the way “eis” is used in the N.T.:

1. [Matt. 3:11](#): “baptism unto (*eis*) repentance” You get baptized because you have repented . You do not get baptized so you can obtain repentance. The order is, “repent and be baptized.”
2. [Matt 12:41](#): “they repented at (*eis*) the preaching of Jonah” Obviously, the preaching came first and then the people repented in response to that preaching.
3. [Matt. 28:19](#): “Baptizing them in (*eis*) the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Ghost” The Triune God exists before one is baptized.
4. [Mk. 1:9](#): “baptized of John in (*eis*) Jordan”
Jesus did not come into possession of the Jordan River as He was baptized. The Jordan existed long before baptism was invented.
5. [1 Cor. 10:2](#): “baptized unto (*eis*) Moses”
Moses existed before the “baptism” in the Red Sea. The people were not “baptized” in order to obtain Moses. Their “baptism” was in response to his leadership.

Conclusion

As long as the Campbellites teach that baptism is essential for salvation, they will be viewed as a cult by evangelical Christians. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from obedience to any of God’s commands. Works are the evidence of salvation instead of the basis for it.



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