



## ***What Churches of Christ Wish That Christian Churches Knew About Churches of Christ***

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It's a great joy to be here with you today. I want to thank those that recommended me for this presentation and those that invited me to participate. I am pleased to be a part of this great theme of unity in Christ. The dream that many of us had twenty years ago when the Restoration Forums began is now being realized among our memberships.

It's an honor and a joy to share the platform today with my friend, Victor Knowles. Victor and I became friends through the Restoration Forums that have been conducted annually since 1984. I have always found Victor to be loyal to God and to Jesus Christ

Yesterday, I visited Cane Ridge and stood in the pulpit of that old historic church. I saw the original log walls that heard the voice of Barton Warren Stone calling for church reform and Christian unity. My spirit was moved within me to work even harder for both these ideals.

I did find it amusing that our great movement began in a county named Bourbon. May God help us to be intoxicated with his Spirit to continue that great work.

What do we want Christian Churches to know about Churches of Christ?

**First, we want you to know who we are theologically.**

We love and serve the same God you do—the holy, eternal, triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that there is but one God who creates all, redeems all, and judges all. We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate, who existed as God from all eternity, but who through a virgin conception became flesh to save us from our sins.

We believe that all men are sinners and thus all men need deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. God provides this deliverance as a free gift when we believe the

facts about Jesus, trust in him as our Lord and Savior, turn from our sins, and are immersed in his name. It is then that God forgives our sins, gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit, writes our name in the Lamb's book of life, and unites us with all other obedient believers in the one body of Christ, the church of the living God.

We believe that disciples of Jesus, through the help and assistance of God's Spirit should be made in the image of Jesus and live like Jesus. We believe that living for Jesus means that we should confess him as Lord in everything we do and say

We believe that the Old and New Testaments are the written word of God, inspired, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and fully able to equip us thoroughly unto every good work. We believe that the written word, the Bible, and the Bible alone, reveals the living word, Jesus, and they together are the final authority in all matters pertaining to life and doctrine. We believe that the Bible must be studied carefully and read for all its worth. We interpret the Bible using all the the historical, grammatical, and exegetical tools available.

We believe that the Scriptures reveal the perfect, ideal church in the mind of God and that all of us need to submit ourselves to God's will for his church. We believe the orthodox faith as presented in the Scriptures and as confessed by the early church.

We believe in the restoration principles presented by men like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone, and other giants of the American Restoration Movement. We believe that the principles laid down in Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address on Christian Unity express what God wants us to do in Christendom to restore unity among all believers in Christ.

We believe that the church is to obey Christ in all matters, that the gospel is powerful and effective, and that the

revelation of God through the apostles is final and complete. Therefore, we have no right to change or modify any principle of the gospel, or of our response to it. We practice immersion of believers as the one baptism of the Scriptures. We assemble on the first day of the week, the day of Jesus' resurrection, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

We do not devise any new ways of worship but practice those things that are biblically based that date back to apostolic times. We invite all believers to take bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus. We offer up prayers to God. We confess our sins. We praise his name with our voices that have been redeemed by blood. We hear his holy word read and listen to preaching and teaching of the word. We fellowship and encourage one another with holy greetings, warm words and loving acts. We give back to God and his work out of what he has freely given to us. We organize our churches according to biblical teachings with teachers, evangelists, elders, deacons and others in places of responsibility to mature and equip the body. We believe that we must be faithful in proclaiming the gospel to every person everywhere.

We believe that Jesus Christ will return again to eternally save the church and to judge the world. We believe that Jesus himself will take the righteous into an eternal heaven and consign the wicked into an eternal hell.

**Second, we want you to know who we are in relationship to others.** We affirm that every person who surrenders to Jesus Christ in biblical baptism is born again of water and Spirit and is thus added by God to his universal kingdom. This means that throughout the world anyone who has a New Testament or who hears the message of Jesus can become a believer like those in New Testament times.

Historically, we trace our roots to the reformatory works of the Campbells and Stone but spiritually and theologically our roots go back to Pentecost. Churches of Christ represent only one thousandth of the Christian world. We do not claim to be the only Christians, but Christians only.

We believe that God is at work everywhere in the hearts of all people who earnestly desire him and seek him and submit to the truth that they know. It is our task to love others into the kingdom and into a greater understanding and practice of biblical teachings, even as Jesus did when he came into the world. We take people where they are and help them along as we grow ourselves.

We want to be as patient, as loving, as forgiving, as kind, as tolerant, as understanding, as accepting, and as honest and truthful with others as God is with us. We view those outside our movement as honest, sincere and as spiritually devoted and concerned as we are. When we talk with others, we know that everything people learned from the Bible without us is true and does not need to be reprogrammed. We teach people like Jesus taught people. He started where people were and took them to where he wanted them to be. We appreciate every good work being done in the name of Jesus in the world today and praise God for the good fruits of these ministries. It is not our business to keep the books of the kingdom. God knows those that are his.

**Third, we want you to know who we are within our diverse fellowship.** In the Churches of Christ we have some of the most loving, kind, generous, and spiritual people that you will ever meet. On the other hand, we have some of the most divisive, cantankerous, pessimistic, hardheaded and hard-hearted people that you will ever meet. "That's church." The first century churches were in many ways similar. Just read the letter to the Corinthians, Galatians, or to the seven churches of Asia for proof. We have had as many divisions among us as any other religious group. We have congregations that will not recognize, accept, or enter into relationships with certain other congregations. We use the terms "liberal" and "conservative" or "traditional" and "progressive" quite a lot. Of course, those terms mean nothing in and of themselves. They only have meaning in context and in relationship to what the issues are. We are all liberals according to some people and we are all traditionalists according to others.

Some of our congregations live so much in fear of breaking God's rules that they have lost their joy and are bound by human traditions. The loss of joy and passion in our worship and ministry accounts for the loss of membership in some of our congregations. When we ourselves are not satisfied in Christ, we have nothing to share with the unchurched and unsaved world that is exploding around us. Our people have often been locked into a traditional mindset that is afraid of change—afraid to change the order of services, the types of songs, the way we sing with hymnals or "off the wall" with projectors, the time and length of services, or the way we serve communion or take the offering. Last week a preacher in Alabama wrote in a gospel paper that he advised against a congregation singing songs during the offering because the next thing you know people would be singing during the communion. Everybody knows, according to him, that you cannot do two acts of worship at once. We have churches that use the King

James Version only that are suspicious of churches that use the New International Version. We have churches where handclapping for any reason is forbidden.

But lest we be too discouraged, remember that narrowness of thinking and sectarian attitudes are found in all types of religious groups. For example, Gene Getz and Philip Yancy have written of the legalism of the churches and denominational circles of their youth. These churches had nothing to do with our Restoration Movement.

The good news is that some of our congregations are breaking out of a rigid, stifling traditionalism and seeking to employ all biblical ways of experiencing, worshiping, and serving God. These churches are committed deeply to the pleas of unity, love, and restoration of our hearts to the image of God. A large number of our preachers, congregations, universities, and gospel papers are reflecting new growth and changes in attitudes and perspectives. Among them, there is an openness to explore new ideas in view of old truth, to confess our sins, and to discover afresh the power of God and his Spirit. They are searching for authentic Christianity. They are experiencing God in worship, serving him among the homeless and the poor, and going to the uttermost parts of the world in bold missions.

The youth, college students, and young families in the Churches of Christ are re-energizing our congregations. They care little about church fusses and fights of a hundred years ago. They want Jesus. They want the Holy Spirit. They want non-denominational, non-sectarian Christianity. They want to restore the restoration!

People today want simple church. They want free and independent churches that preach and practice Acts 2 Christianity. This is what we claim to be. This should be our finest hour.

**Fourth, we want you to know why we are committed to *a cappella* music in Christian worship.**

**Biblically**, the New Testament speaks only of vocal music in the church's praise and worship of God.

**Doctrinally**, New Testament worship is personal, spiritual, from the heart, on the lips, rational, edifying, and not mechanical or instrumental, as in Old Testament times. Charles Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, preached every Sunday to over 10,000 people in the London Metropolitan Tabernacle. He opposed instrumental music in all of his services. He said that he had "just as soon pray with machinery as to sing with machinery."

**Historically**, church historians and hymnologists agree that early Christian music was all *a cappella*. For five hundred years, the church fathers unanimously opposed instruments in Christian worship because it imitated pagan worship, was contrary to the tenor and spirit of redemptive Christian praise, and re-introduced Jewish types into Christian worship. The church was *a cappella* for the first thousand years of her history.

*A cappella* music was the only music of our own restoration movement during its first sixty years. *A cappella* music was the only music of Barton Warren Stone. The pump organ was not introduced into Cane Ridge church until 1882, thirty-eight years after the death of Stone. Alexander Campbell wrote against the use of instruments in Christian worship.

Churches of Christ are not unique in practicing *a cappella* music. For example, *a cappella* music is the only worship practice of the one hundred million members of the Orthodox churches worldwide.

Twenty years ago I had hopes that the Christian Churches would be willing to forego the use of instruments in order to unify our worship practices and be able to more fully cooperate together in every endeavor. My hopes were never realized. Now, to the contrary, some *a cappella* churches are abandoning the practice and adding instruments to their worship. The main reason they are doing it is because they believe that instruments are one of the keys to the interests and hearts of people today.

However, *a cappella* music, where redeemed hearts speak to the Redeemer and the redeemed, can be very touching and experiential if it is appropriately expressed and utilized in all its expressions. It seems to me that here at this convention when thousands of us sing together that the music is most spiritual and edifying when it is sung without accompaniment. More than anything else, seekers today want authenticity. *A cappella* music, from the heart and lips of every believer, can be very authentic and heart-stirring.

Instruments can actually work against the nature of edifying assemblies because often they are so loud that they prevent the worshipers from focusing on the message of the songs. When instruments are used, many do not sing because they depend so much on the instruments. Thousands of non-growing, instrumental churches in a wide variety of church fellowships prove that instruments do not necessarily bring growth.

**Fifth, we want you to know that most of us believe that ignoring or minimizing our differences will not solve the separation between Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.** We must keep studying and discussing the basic dividing issue between us: how we deal with the silence of the New Testament on instruments in Christian worship? Does that silence allow instruments or is the vocal music only practice of the early church a spiritual directive for us today?

Most of us in the *a cappella* churches do not think that using instruments in Christian worship is just a matter of opinion. The use of instruments is not a private opinion because their usage forces everyone in the assembly who wants to sing with them, whether they want to or not.

We believe instruments are an addition to the worship that were introduced hundreds of years after the apostles. The division in our movement came because some brethren introduced a form of Jewish and pagan worship that was never practiced by any church in the New Testament.

We view the use of instruments in Christian worship in the same category as we would someone who would want to celebrate the Lord's supper monthly or annually or appoint monarchical bishops. The New Testament is silent on both of these issues and it does not specifically condemn either practice. If we reason that practices not mentioned in the New Testament and not forbidden by the New Testament are approved by God, then the elements of Catholicism like incense, celibacy, images, holy water, limbo, the confessional to clergy, the hierarchy, and daily mass would be acceptable in Christian worship and doctrine.

We need to find a way we can experience greater unity and work together in love and peace with one another. We all want unity, and a way to solve our differences. Perhaps we should get our best and brightest spiritual minds together to intensely study the Scriptures and how we interpret them to see if any progress can be made.

**Sixth, we want you to know that we are undergoing some heart-searching changes in focus and emphasis.** By and large, Churches of Christ are not growing by conversions. There are some exceptions, but not many. Basically, we are maintaining, and sometimes not even that. This pains me deeply. I love the American Restoration Movement and especially my wing of it, the Churches

of Christ. We have had and still do have some great victories, some mighty congregations, and some spiritual giants, both male and female, in the last two hundred years. But we are now struggling, much like a butterfly breaking out of its chrysalis, to become what we have always claimed to be, but have not practiced all that well.

We want to define ourselves in view of the cross and our commitment to Jesus and the gospel. We want to serve God with grace, love, and humility in the power of the Holy Spirit. We know that worship, service of God and faithfulness to God are much bigger than merely abstaining from instruments in worship. We want to free our hearts from negativism, judgmentalism and sectarianism. We want to discover the dynamic power of the various styles and presentations of vocal music. We want to enthusiastically and spiritually worship. The real question for us is not, "Are we singing *a cappella*?" but, "Are we experiencing God and worshipping God when we are singing *a cappella*?"

**Finally, we want you to know that we love you as brothers and sisters in Jesus.** We appreciate you and your good works for Christ Jesus. We are amazed at your phenomenal growth in the last two decades. We are here to soak up some of your joyous spontaneity, your love, your openness, your boldness, your missions, your church planting, and your loving and supportive cooperation among congregations.

Thanks, once more, for inviting me to share my heart with you. I invite you to visit a Church of Christ or attend our lectureships and workshops such as those at Tulsa, Abilene Christian University, Harding University, Pepperdine University or any of our other universities. You can also learn much about us by reading [The Christian Chronicle](#), our largest newspaper, and some of our other periodicals.

"Grace and peace to all those who love the Lord Jesus with an undying love."

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