

# The "Great Communion"

**Introduction.** Over the last several weeks, calls have gone out to members of the Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and churches of Christ to share in a special communion or observation of the Lord's supper on October 4, 2009 called the "Great Communion." These specific groups were chosen and invited because they have historical ties to the "Restoration Movement."

This day was chosen because it is "World Communion Sunday" -- a day first established by the Presbyterians in 1939 and practiced among some denominations since then. This year marks the 200th anniversary of the "Declaration and Address" set forth by Thomas Campbell in 1809. Some believe this to be the "founding document" of the "Restoration Movement." Organizers say, "This, we thought, was the perfect opportunity to remember Thomas Campbell and his contribution, as well as live out the unity that we all hold so dear." As we will see, the "Great Communion" is an appeal for the Lord's church to demonstrate unity with those who are doing wrong in God's sight.

## I. ***Our "Constitution"?***

- A. In early America, men from every walk of life and from differing religious groups (Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, etc.) gave up creeds and united on slogans such as "Where the Bible speaks, we will speak; where it is silent, we will be silent" and "We will call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways." These "slogans" are scriptural concepts (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Peter 4:11).
- B. With these ideas, men such as Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, and many others started a movement that came to be called the "Restoration Movement" because it sought to return to the New Testament.
- C. Douglas Foster, from Abilene Christian University, claims that the "Declaration and Address" is the "constitution" of the "Restoration Movement." The definition of "constitution" is "The fundamental laws and principles that normally govern the operation of a state or association."
- D. When Thomas Campbell set forth the Declaration, he plainly did not want to make a creed. Just before he laid out his 13 propositions, he wrote, "Let none imagine that the subjoined propositions are at all intended as an overture towards a new creed, or standard, for the church."
- E. But what is the difference if we call this document a "constitution" instead of a "creed"? Viewing the "Declaration and Address" as a constitution or a creed is an unscriptural concept. Can you imagine

- holding a communion service to celebrate a creed written by a man? How sectarian can you get? What would we say if someone took communion to celebrate the writings of Martin Luther or John Calvin?
- F. The religious world has been divided by the creeds of men. To take the "Declaration and Address" of Thomas Campbell and turn it into our "constitution" is the same kind of sectarianism. And then to celebrate that "constitution" in a communion service is so twisted and unscriptural that it defies imagination! Thomas Campbell's words are not the "constitution" of the Lord's body.
- G. If we are going to use the "Declaration and Address" as a "constitution," we might as well denominate ourselves as "Campbellites" and give up arguments against sectarianism.

## II. ***Problems With The "Great Communion"***

- A. The "Great Communion" is a violation of what the Bible teaches about the Lord's supper.
1. It is not to celebrate what some man has done or written. Communion is about Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). If you are partaking of the Lord's supper to celebrate man's words, then you are not remembering the Lord. In remembering man, you are not reverently discerning the Lord's body and blood (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).
  2. A communion service cannot wipe away sins. For an alien sinner, sins are washed away in water baptism by the blood of Christ (Acts 22:16). For an erring Christian, sins are wiped away when they confess and repent (Acts 8:18-24; 1 John 1:9).
  3. One of the many doctrines separating the Lord's church from the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Church is the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship. Since worshiping God with a mechanical instrument is sinful (John 4:24; Colossians 3:17), then having a joint communion service will not take that sin away.
- B. Participation in the "Great Communion" is a violation of the Bible doctrine of fellowship.
1. Jim Riggs, an elder at the First Christian Church in Lufkin, said, "Over 200 years the three strains (of the Stone-Campbell movement) have gone our different ways slightly, but the Lord's table is what unifies us."
  2. But since worshiping God with mechanical instruments is sinful, we cannot extend fellowship to those who use them (Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11).
  3. Joint participation in this "Great Communion" violates the lines of fellowship that God has drawn. We cannot overlook this in order to

- “agree to disagree,” for this violates the command that we “all speak the same thing” (1 Corinthians 1:10).
- C. The “Great Communion” is an effort to demonstrate unity that is against the Bible.
1. Not all unity is acceptable to God (cf. John 17:20-21). Purity, which comes by doing God’s will, comes before peace (James 3:17). Peace is therefore subservient to purity.
  2. Peace is not to be desired or obtained at any cost. Why would we want to demonstrate a unity with those who defy God in their teaching, practice, and worship?
- D. Participation in the “Great Communion” sets us up as unrighteous judges.
1. We are to judge “righteous judgment” (John 7:24), but there are some judgments we do not have the right to make. We have no right to make a judgment that violates the Bible. When we judge it is acceptable to join in fellowship with those in error, then we have stepped out of fellowship with God.
  2. Who are we to judge that the unauthorized practice of worshiping with the instrument does not matter? Violating Colossians 3:16-17 and worshiping in our own way, devised in our own hearts, is sinful. Joint participation in this event would give the impression that these principles do not matter (cf. Leviticus 10:1-2).
- E. A celebration of the writings of Thomas Campbell is an insult to the Bible.
1. When the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into “all truth” (John 16:13), there was no record of Thomas Campbell’s “Declaration and Address.”
  2. We are complete in Christ and in His word (Romans 1:16-17; Colossians 2:10), not in Thomas Campbell’s “Declaration and Address.”
  3. Is it not strange that we need the “Declaration and Address” of Thomas Campbell as a “constitution” when Peter claimed that God had already given us everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)?
  4. Paul never mentioned Thomas Campbell when he declared that the scriptures equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- F. The “Great Communion” is dishonest.
1. We refuse to be moved by those who tell us that if we condemn their use of instrumental music in worship that we are sectarian. In fact, Thomas Campbell, in his “Declaration and Address,” wrote, “Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church; or be made a term of communion amongst Christians, that is not as old as the New Testament” (Proposition 5). Instrumental

music is not as old as the New Testament. Scholars admit it was not used in New Testament worship.

2. Thomas Campbell further wrote, "That, (in some instances), a partial neglect of the expressly revealed will of God; and, (in others), an assumed authority for making the approbation of human opinions, and human inventions, a term of communion, by introducing them into the constitution, faith, or worship, of the church; are, and have been, the immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged causes, of all the corruptions and divisions that ever have taken place in the church of God" (Proposition 11). Those who use the instrument have made it a test of communion. When you bring this "human invention" into the worship, you say to all present, "Worship in this way and be quiet, or leave." How can this possibly be endeavoring to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3)?
3. In their insistence on using this innovation of man, advocates of instrumental music in worship have divided the church and now wish to camouflage themselves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Lying is sinful, and it is a lie to call for unity while participating in unauthorized practices that have divided brethren (Ephesians 4:25).

**Conclusion.** Everyone here supports all calls for the kind of unity the scripture demands (1 Corinthians 1:10). But we cannot endorse or participate in this "Great Communion" celebration. It is sad that some are taking the great memorial of the Lord's supper and using it to advance a sectarian and divisive agenda, and then claiming that it is a way to demonstrate unity.

The greatest care must always be exercised by Christians to discern between righteousness and sin. Having discerned the difference, Christians then must stand for truth and not compromise with evil by teaching unity in diversity. To do so jeopardizes our souls and weakens the church for which Jesus gave His life.

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