BARTON WARREN STONE AND THE PRESBYTERIANS

Prayer
Scripture: Mark 16:15, 16
Hymn: 460 "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

The time of the Second Awakening was a time in the history of the new nation, the United States, when men had the courage to dream dreams and had the faith that dreams could come true. One of the dreams that appeared in different sections of the country and in different denominations was the dream of answering the Savior's prayer for the unity of his followers by going back to the teachings of the New Testament. James O'Kelly led a group out of the Methodist Church in Virginia and North Carolina who were determined to recognize no head of the Church except the Christ, to accept no book of authority in religion except the Bible, to wear no name except the name Christian, and to recognize no test of fellowship except Christian character. In New England, Abner Jones and Elias Smith, two Baptist preachers, led groups out of Baptist Churches, to form churches that had no head but Christ, that had no rule of faith and practice except the New Testament, that would wear no name except the name Christian, whose only test of fellowship would be an upright walk and meek deportment, and who would accept as brethren all who gave evidence that they were children of God. In Kentucky and Tennessee a Presbyterian preacher, Barton Warren Stone, left the Presbyterian Church to form churches that would accept no man-made creeds and that would wear no name except the name Christian. The Bible alone would be their guide in faith and practice. James O'Kelly revolted against the undemocratic form of government of the Methodist Church. Abner Jones and Elias Smith revolted against the Calvinistic doctrine of the Baptists. Barton W. Stone revolted against the Calvinism of the Presbyterian Church.

Background and Early Life of Barton W. Stone

Barton Warren Stone was born near Port Tobacco in the Maryland Tidewater, on December 24, 1772. He belonged to the fifth generation of English Puritans who came to America. His great-great-great grandfather, Captain William Stone (1603-1695) was the first Protestant governor of the Catholic Province of Maryland, serving from 1648 to 1653. Captain Stone received a grant of five thousand acres in Charles County on the Potomac. Two of Barton W. Stone's ancestors signed the "Remonstrance" of 1689, drawn up by the Protestants of Charles County against the Catholics. One was Captain William Barton and the other was Colonel Humphrey Warren of Stone's maternal lineage. Richard Warren, of Stone's maternal lineage was one of the Puritans on the Mayflower. Colonel Humphrey Warren was the first of the maternal ancestors to settle in Charles County. Thomas Stone, the son of a brother of Barton W. Stone's paternal grandfather, was a Maryland signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Barton W. Stone's father was John Stone and his mother was Mary Warren Musgrave Stone. She was John Stone's second wife. Her first husband, Harrison Musgrave, had died in 1760. Barton W. Stone was named for his maternal grandfather, Barton Warren. The inventories of the estates of Barton W. Stone's ancestors indicate that they were fairly well-to-do planters who owned slaves.
The Stones belonged to the Church of England. Barton W. was sprinkled by the rector, the Reverend Thomas Thornton.

John Stone died when Barton W. was only three years old—he later declared that he had no memory of his father. The father’s will divided his children—seven sons, one daughter, and one grandson—into two groups which might indicate that the sons in the first group were by his first wife. They were Thomas, Josias, William, and John. The grandson was probably the son of a daughter who had died. The second group were Matthew, Warren, Elizabeth, and Barton. The inventory of the estate given in the will marked John Stone as a gentleman.

Barton W. Stone’s first seven years were spent in Maryland. In 1779 his mother moved her family to Pittsylvania County in the Dan River Valley of Virginia near the North Carolina border.

The Revolutionary War made a lasting impression on Barton W. Stone. He was in his ninth year when the British made their final desperate effort to defeat the Americans by an invasion of the southern states. He saw his older brothers join the Pittsylvania militia of General Green. His mother had Barton and two of his brothers hide their horses in brushwood to save them from scouting parties. Tories and bands of thieves ravaged the countryside. Barton W. formed a lasting hatred of the Tories. He well remembered the roar of the artillery in the battle of Guilford Court House between the forces of General Green and Lord Cornwallis, thirty miles away in North Carolina.

When the soldiers returned from the war Stone was shocked at the vices they brought back—vices hardly known in their community before—profane swearing, debauchery, drunkenness, gambling, quarreling and fighting. These vices spread in the community. Stone later wrote, "Such are universally the effects of war, than which a greater evil cannot assail and afflict a nation." He was thankful that he never participated in these vices.

Stone clearly remembered three teachers of his early years in the Virginia backwoods country. One was a tyrant who seemed to delight in whipping and abusing the pupils for every trifling offense. He was so afraid of this teacher that when called upon he was unable to recite. After a few days his mother sent him to another teacher who taught him the rudiments of English, reading, writing, and arithmetic. Geography and science were unknown and not sought after in that community. His third teacher was an Englishman, Robert W. Somerhays, who quickly gained a reputation as a prodigy of learning. Stone spent four or five years under this teacher until the teacher pronounced him a finished scholar. The people of the community recognized him as such and he considered himself above mediocrity.

Stone had learned to love to read and often retired from the company of youthful companions to indulge in reading. The only books available in the community were the Bible and the novels of Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett—Peregrine Pickle, Tom Jones, and Roderic Random and the like. Stone considered such novels to be "trash." He became so familiar with the Bible that he wished for greater variety. He later wrote, "...I wish to leave my testimony in favor of making the Bible a school book. By this means the young mind receives information and impressions, which are not erased through life. The Bible, not read in school, is seldom read afterwards. To this, as one
leading cause, may be attributed the present growth of infidelity and skepticism, then scarcely known and never openly avowed in all our country."

The end of the war was followed by a noticeable decline in religion. With the disestablishment of the Church of England the priests' salaries were abolished and most of the priests returned to England. The Lord's Day was converted into a day of pleasure. The house of worship was deserted. Wickedness abounded and every man did what seemed right in his own eyes.

A few Baptist preachers visited Stone's community, among them Samuel Harris, Dutton Lane, and S. Cantrell. Their revival preaching, the testimonies of their converts, and the practice of immersion were novelties. Stone was one of the many spectators attracted to witness these strange practices. He was greatly impressed by the converts' great distress under conviction of sin, by their joyful testimonies of deliverance accompanied by dreams, visions, voices, strange lights. He witnessed their immersion and reception into the Baptist fellowship. He recognized the reformation in the lives of the converts. The Baptists had a preaching style of their own—a kind of whining, sing-song voice—that powerfully moved the sinners. Seeing the change for the better in the lives of the converts Stone came to consider the work of the Baptists to be the work of God and their manner of conversion the way of salvation.

A few Methodist preachers came to the community. Stone was impressed by their grave, holy, meek, plain, and humble manner, and the way their very presence checked levity in all around them. He was impressed by their fervent and unaffected zeal. The Baptists and the Episcopalians bitterly opposed them. The Baptists accused the Methodists of denying the doctrines of grace, of preaching salvation by works, and publicly declared them to be the locusts of the Apocalypse.

Stone became quite disturbed over the differences in religion represented by these groups. He had experienced a growing desire for religion and had formed the habit of retiring in secret, morning and evening, for prayer. The differences in religion so confused him that he became discouraged and quit praying, and turned to the youthful sports of the day.

John Stone's will provided that when Barton W., the youngest child, reached twenty-one years of age, the children's part of the estate should be divided equally among the children. When Barton W. was fifteen or sixteen, the three older brothers, who were penniless and eager to start lives of their own, begged for a division of the estate. Barton W. willingly acceded. He gave careful consideration to what he should do with his part. He decided to spend it on education. He wanted to become a lawyer—the heroes of Virginia were the great statesmen who had played such an important part in framing the government of the new nations. His mother and his brothers approved of his plans and promised to give him help as he needed it.

**Stone At Guilford Academy**

Barton W. Stone, just past seventeen, journeyed thirty miles from his home to Guilford, North Carolina, where he entered the Guilford Academy of Dr. David Caldwell. It was one of the most noted schools in the southern states. David Caldwell was in his sixty-fifth year. He had started the school twenty-three
years earlier. He was a native of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He had graduated from the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1761. He was ordained at Trenton, New Jersey, in 1765, and in 1767 had come to North Carolina to minister to the Presbyterian churches at Buffalo and Alamance. He built a two-story log cabin at Guilford and opened a school that became the seminary for the Presbyterians of that section of the country. He lived in the upper story and the lower story was the school room. He added log cabins for boarding students. He offered a strong program in the classics. He turned out some fifty Presbyterian preachers and five state governors. To support himself he farmed and practiced medicine—he had studied medicine under Dr. Benjamin Rush at Philadelphia. He had about fifty students in the school.

Barton W. Stone entered the school on the first day of February, 1790, and began the study of Latin Grammar. He resolved that he would let nothing interfere with his getting an education. He stript himself of every hindrance, denying strong food and living chiefly on milk and vegetables. He allowed himself only six or seven hours of sleep at night. He so applied himself that he passed several classes and soon found himself ranked with students who similarly applied themselves.

When Stone arrived at the Academy he found it filled with great religious excitement. The Presbyterian evangelist, James McGready, had recently visited the community and about thirty of the students experienced conversion. Stone learned that these students met every morning in a private room an hour before school and engaged in prayer and singing. Their daily walk convinced him of their sincere piety and happiness. He was moved to serious reflection on religion. He labored to banish such thoughts out of a fear that religion would impede his progress in learning and thwart his reaching his goal of becoming a lawyer. He also had a strong feeling that his relatives would frown on his getting involved in religion. He began to associate with that part of the students who made light of divine things. He joined in their impious jests. His conscience so bothered him that he could enjoy the company neither of the pious nor of the impious.

Stone made up his mind to transfer to Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia to get away from religion—he did not know that a great revival was flourishing on the campus of Hampden-Sidney. He made up his mind to leave the next morning but that morning a great storm prevented his leaving. He made up his mind to pursue his studies in the Academy, to mind his own business, and to let everyone else to their own way. Later in life, looking back on this experience, he wrote, "From this I have learned that the most effectual way to conquer the depraved heart, is, the constant exhibition of piety and a godly life in the professors of religion."

A short time after this James McGready returned to the area. Stone's roommate, Benjamin McReynolds, a pious young Virginian, politely asked Stone to walk with him to hear McGready. Stone first found the preacher's appearance unattractive but his piercing eyes and tremulous voice soon seemed unearthly. The preacher seemed to have forgotten everything except the salvation of souls. Stone had never experienced such an earnest presentation of the joys of heaven and the miseries of hell, nor such a powerful plea to sinners to flee from the wrath to come. Stone declared that had he been standing he would have sunk to the floor.
After the service Stone returned to his room. He was so disturbed that he went out into an old field where he seriously reasoned with himself about religion:

What shall I do? Shall I embrace religion now, or not? I impartially weighted the subject, and counted the cost. If I embrace religion, I must incur the displeasure of my dear relatives, lose the favor and company of my companions—become the object of their scorn and ridicule—relinquish all my plans and schemes for worldly honor, wealth and preferment, and bid a final adieu to all the pleasures in which I had lived, and hoped to live on earth. Are you willing to make this sacrifice to religion? No, no, was the answer of my heart. Then the certain alternative is, you must be damned. Are you willing to be damned—to be banished from God—from heaven—from all good—and suffer the pains of eternal fire? No, no, responded my heart—I cannot endure the thought. After due deliberation, I resolved from that hour to seek religion at the sacrifice of every earthly good, and immediately prostrated myself before God in supplication for mercy.

The preaching that Stone had heard led him to expect a long and painful struggle to attain conversion to Christ and to get religion. For a year he was tossed on waves of uncertainty—laboring, praying, agonizing for saving faith. He became despondent and despaired of ever receiving saving faith. He had been taught that mankind was so totally depraved that they could not believe, repent, nor obey the gospel until they experienced the immediate regeneration that was the immediate work of the Spirit that wrought faith and repentance in the heart. The sinner had to wait for God's own sovereign time.

In February, 1791, with some fellow students Stone attended a meeting on Sandy River in Virginia. The preachers were J. B. Smith, president of Hampden-Sidney College, Cairy Allen, James Blythe, Robert Marshall, and James McGready. On the Lord's day President Smith spoke on "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, though wilt not despise." Stone felt the sermon described his own condition and hope began to rise. When Smith exhorted all the broken hearted to come to the Lord's table on pain of God's sore displeasure, for the first time Stone partook of the Lord's Supper.

When it came McGready's turn to preach his text was "Tekel, thou art weighted in the balances, and art found wanting." He demolished all hopes from legal works by the sinner, all the hiding places of hypocrites, he pictured the damnation of the unregenerate in the deepest colors. Stone lost all hope. McGready tried to arouse him from his hopelessness but left him without a single encouraging word.

Stone returned to the Academy in deep depression. His strength failed. Sighs and groans filled his days. His mother heard of his condition and sent for him. His altered condition shocked all his relatives and awaked in them a new concern for the Lord. In private he and his mother discussed his condition fully. She had always been a praying member of the Church of England. Out of concern for her son she more earnestly sought the Lord and joined the Methodists.
Stone returned to the Academy still in the same frame of mind. A little later he attended a meeting in Alamance in Guilford County, where a great revival was in progress. The preacher, William Hodge, was a "New Light" Presbyterian who had been trained by David Caldwell. He had been out preaching only a year. His text was "God is love." With tears he spoke of God's love for sinners. Stone began to experience new hope but he thought of the common admonition, "Take heed lest you be deceived." Surely this new hope could not be the work of the Almighty power of God's Spirit. It was too instantaneous.

After the sermon Stone retired to the woods with his Bible. He read and prayed and wavered between hope and fear:

But the truth I had just heard, "God is love," prevailed. Jesus came to seek and save the lost—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." I yielded and sunk at his feet a willing subject. I loved him—I adored him—I praised him aloud in the silent night—in the echoing grove around. I confessed to the Lord my sin and folly in disbelieving his word so long—and in following so long the devices of men. I now saw that a poor sinner was as much authorized to believe in Jesus at first, as at last—that now was the accepted time, and day of salvation.

From that time Stone lived devoted to God. The study of dead languages became a pleasure for he was doing them for the glory of God. He was resolved to devote his all to the Heavenly Father. He received great encouragement from Rachel Craighead Caldwell, the wife of Dr. Caldwell and daughter of a Presbyterian preacher.

Stone had run out of money and his relatives refused to help. Dr. Caldwell urged him to continue his studies and promised to wait until he was able to pay. With this encouragement Stone completed his studies.

Upon finishing the course of study Stone confessed to Dr. Caldwell his desire to preach the gospel but that he had not received a divine call. Dr. Caldwell assured him that he had no right to expect a miracle. The only call he needed was a desire to glorify God and to save sinners and the encouragement of his fathers in the ministry. Dr. Caldwell promised to arrange for Stone to present himself as a candidate for the ministry to the next meeting of the Orange Presbytery.

Stone and several fellow students, including Samuel Holmes, a genius among the students, presented themselves as candidates for the ministry in 1793. The Presbytery assigned them topics for a thesis to be presented at the next meeting of the Presbytery. One topic was "The Being and Attributes of God." The topic assigned to Stone was "The Trinity." The textbook for his study was to be Herman Witsius' Divine Economy. Witsius was a Dutch theologian, Regent of the Divinity College of the States of Holland and West Friesland. He had served as Professor of Divinity in the Universities of Franeker, Utrecht, and Leyden. In his Divine Economy Witsius set forth the proofs that there was but one God. In this one God was three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father was unbegotten. The Son was begotten. The Holy Spirit proceeded eternally from the Father and the Son. It was idolatry to worship more Gods than the one. Equal worship must be given to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Stone had never heard a sermon on the Trinity. He had never read any books of theology. The Bible had been his daily companion. Meditation on the Bible and prayer had been his delight. Witsius so confused his mind that he was filled with gloom and fear and was unable to pray. He decided that he should give up theology and find some other work. He confessed his troubles to Holmes who was equally troubled. Both Stone and Holmes had put themselves under the direction of William Hodge of Orange County, North Carolina. They learned that with many Presbyterian preachers in North Carolina the favorite book on the Trinity was Isaac Watts' *Glories of Christ*, published in 1747. They secured copies and found Watts more helpful.

Watts set forth his program as follows:

The Glory of Christ as God-man, displayed in three discourses; viz.: Discourse 1) A survey of the visible appearance of Christ as God, before his incarnation, with some observations on the texts of the Old Testament applied to Christ. Discourse 2) An enquiry into the executive powers of the human nature of Christ, in its present glorified state; with several testimonies annexed. Discourse 3) An argument tracing out the early existence of the human soul of Christ, even before the creation of the world, with an appendix, etc.

A favorite passage from Watts with the preachers was:

The Human Soul of Christ is the brightest Image or Copy of the Divine Nature that is found among mere creatures and tho' it may not receive all the infinite variety of particular ideas of human affairs, which are in the Divine Mind, yet it may receive as a transcript from the Divine Mind, so many of the largest and strongest of those ideas which relate to human affairs, as may be sufficient to qualify Him for the Judge of all, under the immediate influence of the Indwelling Deity.

Watts closed with:

We must wait till Providence and Grace shall join to furnish us with a better clue than this to lead us into the mysterious glories of the Person of our Blessed Redeemer, the more complete knowledge whereof is reserved to entertain saints and angels in the future ages of blessedness. There 'tis certain if we shall be so happy to accept of his Gospel, we shall see Him as He is and behold Him, face to face, then shadows shall flee away and darkness vanish forever, for in His light, we shall see light. Amen.

When the Presbytery met to examine the candidates, the aged Henry Pattillo had been appointed to conduct the examination. Pattillo himself had accepted the views of Watts on the Trinity. He knew that among the members of the Presbytery there was a variety of views on the Trinity. He kept the examination brief and so tactfully conducted it that there was no occasion for clashing views. The candidates were able to answer honestly and satisfactorily. They passed the examination. According to the practice of the times they would receive their license at the next meeting of the Presbytery six months later.
Stone had passed the examination but he was not satisfied in his own mind that he could harmonize theology and the Bible. He would have to keep studying and if he failed in his attempt at harmonization he would have to give up the idea of preaching. The very thought was depressing to him.

Barton W. still owed Dr. Caldwell the debt for his school expenses. His brothers, Matthew and Thomas, had moved to Georgia where they had purchased plantations. Barton Stone decided to visit his brothers, hoping to earn enough money to pay his debt to Dr. Caldwell. He set out for Georgia with only a horse and fifteen dollars. On the way he became so ill that he had to sit down on the grass beside the road, hardly conscious of what he was doing. A man of that community took him to his house and nursed him until he was able to travel again. After reaching his brothers it was several months before he completely recovered.

**Stone As a Teacher in Succoth Academy in Georgia**

A distinguished Methodist preacher, Hope Hull, had recently established Succoth Academy near Washington, Georgia. The brothers used their influence to secure for Barton W. a position in the Academy as Professor of Languages. At the beginning in 1795 there were about seventy students. Barton W. Stone worked hard and soon gained the respect of Hope Hull, of his students, and of the trustees of the Academy. He gained the respect and attention of the more literary people of the area. He began receiving so many invitations to teas and social affairs that he feared for the shipwreck of his faith. His conscience warned him that he was cooling in his relationship with God. He determined to avoid all fascinating pleasures and to live with greater devotion to God.

Hope Hull had moved from Maryland to Georgia. He had been at the Baltimore Conference in 1792 when James O'Kelly withdrew to form the Republican Methodist Church. Hull had sympathized with O'Kelly's motion to democratize the Episcopacy and had voted with O'Kelly but he had not walked out with him. He had continued a Methodist, describing himself as "a shouting Methodist." He had continued to follow with interest the movement of O'Kelly and his followers as they changed from being Republican Methodist to being just Christians.

Hope Hull and Barton W. Stone became close friends. Hull took Stone with him to the meeting of the Methodist Conference at Charleston, South Carolina, on January 1, 1796. There Stone met some twenty Methodist preachers, including Francis Asbury.

While teaching in the Academy, Stone studied French with a Frenchman, Francois Aubir, who had fled to Georgia from the reign of terror in France. Stone had made a beginning in French at Caldwell's Academy.

During his time teaching at Succoth Academy, Stone attended the preaching of a very zealous Presbyterian preacher, John Springer, whose church was near Washington. Stone and Springer became intimate friends and Springer revived in Stone the desire to preach. For a time Stone tried to suppress the desire to preach but finally he gave in and determined to resume his theological studies and to prepare for the ministry. Stone was impressed by Springer's friendly relations with both Methodists and Baptists. Springer was scholarly and yet he preached extemporaneously with warmth and fervor.
Stone's License to Preach

Barton W. Stone received his license to preach on April 6, 1796, in the Hawfields Church in North Carolina. It was an exciting day. There were three candidates: Barton W. Stone, Robert Foster, and Robert Tate. Addressing the candidates and presenting each with his license was the venerable old Presbyterian father, Henry Pattillo. He was seventy years of age. He had been born in Scotland and had come to America when he was nine years old. He had studied theology under Samuel Davies, one of the greatest of the leaders of the Great Awakening in Virginia. He had spent his life building the Presbyterian churches of Virginia and North Carolina. Hampden-Sydney College had conferred on his an honorary degree in 1787. In later years after Stone had left the Presbyterians to be just a Christian and when Presbyterians accused him of insincerely breaking his ministerial vows, he defended himself out of Scripture and out of a little book that Pattillo published in 1788, entitled Sermons. In his preface Pattillo declared:

My motives for this publication...are zeal for truth, and benevolence for the grossly ignorant, the strongly prejudiced, and the carnally secure...also to defend...my practice against some narrow spirits in the church....

Americans are too deep sufferers, from the destructive decrees, and sanguinary counsels, of the right honorables, and right reverends beyond the Atlantick, to retain that respect for their stars, and their mitres, which those must shew, who are under the influence of their sovereignty....Book-writing is but in its infancy in these states. Let no one despise the day of small things. Americans will naturally relish the fruits of their own soil, though they smell of the congenial forest, and fall short of the more elaborate productions of foreign climes....

That Christians of different denominations will always love in proportion as they cultivate acquaintance; converse freely on the great doctrines and duties in which they agree; worship God together, and avoid controversies. There are bigots in all churches. All new converts to a profession, must be allowed a season of bigotry. Of how many spiritual meals does this contracted temper of soul deprive the Christian world? I fear we have many such in our own church, who miss having their souls quickened, by the preaching of an honest Baptist, of a warm Methodist, because they have different views, of some Christian doctrines, from the system embraced among us. Give such hearers what they call a sound sermon, and all is well; though it leaves them as stupid as the seat they sit on. Were my own experience of any weight, with persons of this narrow disposition, I could assure them, that I have often sat with pleasure and profit, under the preaching of both these denominations: and if they dropt a word on their peculiarities, I left that to such as could receive it, and fed on the rest. Who would throw away a purse of gold, because a few pieces of brass had found their way into it? Or spurn from him all the provisions of his table, because a dry leaf lay hid in his salad? To be sound in faith, is highly desirable; but to be pious in practice, is much more excellent. Christians may differ in points of faith, without sapping foundations, or endangering their future happiness: but virtue and holiness are uniformly the same, in all ages, nations, and professions; and indispensably necessary to the Christian character.
To contend earnestly for the faith, is undoubtedly the duty of some; but to study peace and holiness, is the great business of all. An error in judgment, where all honest pains for information have been taken, cannot be ranked among the vices. In such a case, guilt can have no place, for the will is not concerned. One evil word; one wicked action; one harsh censure, as they proceed from the heart, and are the choice of the will, have infinitely more evil in them, than a mistaken judgment has. Thou who judgest, and condemnest thy brother, for unsound opinions, shalt thou escape the judgement of God? The better life of thy brother shall rise up against thee, and condemn thy better faith, that did not work by love.

In his sermon on "Divisions Among Christians" Pattillo declared that the name Christian "was first given to the disciples by divine appointment at Antioch; that name which is the great glory of disciples to wear—that new name promised to the New Testament Church, which the mouth of the Lord should name."

Instead of giving the candidates a copy of the Westminster Confession and placing great emphasis on it, Pattillo gave each candidate a copy of the Bible with this solemn charge, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Barton W. Stone was ready to begin his ministry.

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