BARTON W. STONE EVANGELIST OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Prayer
Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38
Hymn: 392 "Hark! the Voice of Jesus Calling"

Barton W. Stone's experience with the brethren in Georgetown closely resembled his experience with the brethren at Lexington. The brethren at Lexington had promised that if he would move from Tennessee to Lexington, Kentucky, they would support him in the preaching of the Gospel and "supply my family with every necessity"—thus he wrote in his Autobiography. He continued, "But I then learned a lesson, and learned it better afterwards, that good men often make promises which they forget to perform." In Lexington he had to take a job teaching high school to support his family.

Stone did such an outstanding job teaching high school in Lexington that he was offered the principalship of the Rittenhouse Academy in Georgetown. Stone did well as principal of the academy and it greatly increased in enrollment. He started a little congregation in Georgetown that grew from a beginning membership of six or seven to between two and three hundred. Stone wrote, "I was every week baptizing, sometimes thirty at a time, of whom were a number of my pupils, some of whom became useful gospel preachers afterwards."

On November 2, 1819, Stone purchased a farm of one hundred and twenty-three acres on the waters of the North Elkhorn, about a mile from the courthouse in Georgetown. Stone settled his family on the farm. He was very busy teaching school, preaching in Georgetown, training young preachers, evangelizing, and farming. He planned to pay for the farm from his income from the Academy and from the produce of the farm.

Stone Called to be an Evangelist

In 1819 Barton W. Stone was the dean of the preachers among the Kentucky Christians. He was the only elder remaining from the days of the Springfield Presbyterian. His firm stand for the Word of God against human creeds in spite of bitter criticism and opposition had won for him a warm place in the hearts of his brethren. He was respected for his hard work and his loving Christian disposition. He had proved himself as a preacher who could win souls and build churches. The preachers he had attracted to the Christian movement and the young preachers that he had trained and sent out to preach had attracted very favorable attention. The churches around Georgetown decided to ask Stone to give up his teaching to devote full time to evangelizing. Stone left the record of this momentous event in his Autobiography:

The churches, without my knowledge, met together, and determined that it was proper to engage all my time and services in preaching the gospel; and in order to release me from the Academy, they agreed to pay my debt, which I had contracted for a small farm near the town, on which I had moved my family. The only way I had to pay this debt was by the profits of the Academy. They had also agreed to supply myself and family with a comfortable support. A deputation of brethren
was sent to inform me what was done, and to confer with me on the propriety of yielding to their wishes, and to evangelize steadily among the churches. I yielded, and resigned the charge of the Academy, and gave up myself to the work of the ministry. The remembrance of these days, and of the great and good works which were effected by my humble labors, will cause many to shout the praises of God to eternity.

When the time came for the debt to be paid on the farm Stone became fearful because the brethren had not paid the debt. He wrote, "Fair promises kept up my spirits." Finally Stone had to borrow money to meet the payment that was due. He suffered further loss because the creditor would not take the Commonwealth's paper money. He had to pay in silver and gold.

Stone had to give up his evangelizing and return to school teaching. His old position at the Academy had been filled. Failing to find an opening in an established school he had to begin a school of his own. He soon secured as many pupils as he desired and was able to repay the borrowed money. His health failed from overwork—teaching school, farming, preaching on Sundays. Stone was forced to give up teaching entirely. By work on the farm he sought to regain his health and to support his family.

Stone's Family

When Barton W. Stone married Celia Wilson Bowen on October 31, 1811, he had the four little girls left by his first wife. Celia bore him four sons and two daughters: William Bowen, John Henley, Mary Russell (Polly), Barton Warren, Catherine L., and Samuel Matthew. Of Stone's eleven children, three died childless. The others gave him forty-nine grandchildren. Celia was described as "a woman of great strength of character and many excellencies whose life was given to good works." She and Barton W. had thirty-three years together. She survived him by thirteen years.

The Growing Movement

As Stone's health improved and when he could get away from his farm he continued to evangelize. He was an evangelist at heart, ready "in season and out of season" to lead the lost to the Savior. He was equally at home addressing a packed church building or explaining the Bible to a farmer and his wife and children around a kitchen stove. He delighted to travel and work with young evangelists who were won to the ministry by his infectious passion for soul-winning. Once he travelled in Indiana from New Albany to Crawfordsville with Clement Nance and a beginner, James Robeson, who was to have a long and eventful ministry.

Even while forced to make a living by farming Stone started many new churches. In 1823 he organized Union Church, Fayette County, Kentucky, with an initial membership of six. In three years the membership had increased to twenty-two. Stone also organized Republican Church in Fayette County, six miles south of Lexington. After meeting in a small farm building, in 1827 the members erected a brick building. At Brea, Stone organized a church that by 1829 was large enough to host a large conference of Christians. A report in May, 1828, read: "A Christian Church has been a few months ago constituted in Cynthiana, Kentucky. At first it
was composed of not more than five or six. It now consists of about forty members, chiefly new converts. The work progresses through much opposition."

Stone was able to instill into his new congregations the spirit of evangelizing. The preachers, young and old, that he was able to win for the cause, sent him reports of their work. John Longley, who evangelized in Rush County, Indiana, sent Stone a report of his year's work:

On last Christmas Day I constituted a church. Since that time I have constituted two others, and attended with Brother J. B. Thompson in constituting two more, making five in all . . . . I have preached on an average five times a week; and have received into the Church of Christ more than one hundred members, and have immersed fifty; and in the same time I have cleared five acres of wood-land, and raised five hundred bushels of corn, with my own hands, and no other help than two little boys about twelve years old, and one horse. While I was gone abroad to preach the plow must stand. Yet blessed be God, my health and spirits are good, and my family is healthy; and what is better than all, the good cause of my Master is prospering, and prospects look much brighter for the coming year, than they have for the past. Preaching the gospel is in great demand. Could I devote my whole time to the work and preach twice every day, I could not supply half the demands or calls."

Stone was not alone in winning converts and inspiring men to preach. About 1830 on a winter night when a severe blizzard was raging, a visitor came to the meeting house in Lexington, Kentucky. The brother who was giving the lesson explained the plan of salvation. Declaring that Christ was not willing for any to perish, he exhorted any who were not Christians to come to Christ. He urged, "Whosoever will may come." The visitor confessed his Lord and was baptized. He was Jesse Bledsoe. He was a lawyer trained in Transylvania Seminary. His wife was from a prominent Lexington family that boasted that her grandfather had been a companion of George Washington. Bledsoe was faithful in church attendance and eagerly shared in the activities of the congregation. He was asked to preach. He developed into an eloquent preacher and statesman who became a judge, served in both houses of the Kentucky legislature, became Secretary of the State of Kentucky, and a United States Senator. One historian said that he was second only to Henry Clay as an orator in Kentucky. He moved to Mississippi to preach and finally moved on to Texas.

One of Stone's great sorrows was that not all those converted in the revivals continued faithful. He wrote:

We have seen many of these converts soon dwindle, sicken and die, and become more hardened against the fear of God, than they were before—many of them becoming infidels, by thinking that all professors of religion are like themselves, deluded by strong passion and imagination. Others of them cling to the church, held there, not by delight in God, his service, or his people, but from other reasons than such as are approved of God. Others, and lamentable to tell, the fewest number by far, manifest by their walk and conversation, that they are truly pious and accepted of God. All must acknowledge that some good results from such revivals; but all must acknowledge that great evil also grows out of them. Those, who under strong
affections, believed they were born of God, and who made a public profession of faith, and fell from it, are of all people in the most pitiable situation, seldom do they ever after embrace religion. . . . These by their example, discourage others, and fill their minds with prejudices against religion.

Stone felt deep sympathy for the evangelists who often suffered for lack of support. He grieved over "the neglect of the churches in assisting and supporting those who labor in word and doctrine." He wrote:

Many causes have led to this unhappy state of things among us. One is, that preaching has been so far prostrated as to be made a trade, by which to acquire wealth and worldly honor. Seeing this, our hearts have sickened at the sight, and in disgust we have fled to the other extreme, and deny the necessary aid required by the New Testament. Another cause is, that many have almost concluded that there is no need of preachers now that all the members of the church are kings and Priests, and should exercise all the functions of a Priest or preacher. As the clergy once trod the people under their feet the people in turn are determined to tread the clergy or preachers under their feet in order to keep them humble. Another, and I fear, the prevailing cause, is that the churches are in the spirit of the world, and are so wedded to their wealth that they are unwilling to part with the idol of their hearts. It requires all they can get to keep up with the tone and fashions of the world, and to have their families on par with those around them. This is conformity to the world. Whatever be the cause of this neglect, it is a sore evil, and must be removed, or the cause must be retarded in its progress.

The uneducated frontiersmen revelled in their freedom and had little sense of stewardship. They had heard the preaching of "free salvation" and they concluded that the preaching must be free. Stone complained that the preachers had "gone in different directions endeavoring to reclaim sinners until they have spent what little they had." John Allen Gano wrote in 1835, "In preaching the gospel gratuitously for about six years, I became somewhat in debt." One of Stone's associates wrote:

Some in their opposition to the sects have clamored loudly against the salaries of sectarian preachers, and therefore they fell quite indisposed to cross their own track—had they preached the truth instead of railing at others they would not have instilled a parsimonious, contracted spirit in the people. Few men need to be reasoned against giving their money . . . . There is a great defect in the reformation . . . unless something systematic be done it will flag in its childhood, and never grow up to a man in the Lord.

In spite of the poor support the preachers continued to go and to preach. Many tarried for a short time in Kentucky and then followed the moving frontier north, west, and south, into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas. Stone encouraged the preachers. In 1829 he wrote, "To make bread, I know one who has labored by night in his field, with his hoe, while others were reposing in sleep, but, brethren, let us not be discouraged."
Continuing Opposition

When John Poage Campbell, the first outstanding opponent of Barton W. Stone in the Presbyterian press, died near Chillicothe, Ohio, November 4, 1814, from over-exposure in preaching, Thomas Cleland took up the attack on Stone. Cleland (1778-1858) was a native of Fairfax County, Virginia. In 1790 his father had migrated to Marion County in Kentucky. Cleland was trained in a private school in Greensburg, Kentucky and in the Kentucky Academy at Pisgah in Woodford County. He was ordained by the Transylvania Presbytery in October, 1804. He preached for the Springfield and Lebanon Churches. In his home about six miles east of Lebanon he trained about fifteen young men for the Presbyterian ministry, one of whom was John R. Moreland. Cleland moved to Mercer County in 1812 to serve the New Providence Church. He had a reputation for preaching for an hour and a half—the hour given to exposition and the half-hour to expostulation. It was said that he rarely failed to move his audience to tears. He published twenty-one works, three of which were bitter attacks on Barton W. Stone. The first of these attacks contained 101 pages and was published in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1812. It was entitled, The Socini-Arian Detected, A Series of Letters to Barton W. Stone on Some Important Subjects of Theological Discussion referred to in his “Address” to the Christian Churches in Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio. It was provoked by Stone’s first edition of the Address published in Nashville in 1814. Stone’s second and revised edition of this Address to the Christian Churches, published in Lexington in 1821, provoked Cleland to publish at Lexington in 1822 his 168 page work, Letters to Barton W. Stone, Containing a Vindication principally of the Doctrines of the Trinity, the Divinity and Atonement of the Saviour, against his recent attack, in a second edition of his “Address.” Stone replied in a 164 page work published in Lexington in 1824 in which he listed himself as the author, “Barton W. Stone, an Elder in the Church of Christ.” The work was entitled, Letters to James Blythe, D.D., designed as a Reply to the Arguments of Thomas Cleland, D.D., against my Address, 2nd edition, on the Nature of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Atonement, and etc. Cleland came back in 1825 with a 124 page reply published in Lexington under the title, Unitarianism Unmasked; Its Anti-Christian Features Displayed; Its Infidel Tendency Exhibited; and Its Foundation Shown to be Untenable; in a Reply to Barton W. Stone’s Letters to the Rev. Dr. Blythe.

In his Letters to James Blythe, Stone set forth a six point platform: 1) That with us there is but one God, the Father, 2) And one Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, 3) That believers are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, 4) That regeneration and salvation are the works of the Spirit by the means of the gospel. 5) That the Spirit is received through faith, 6) That all obedient Believers are one in Christ Jesus.

Stone summed up what he opposed: 1) That there are three equal Gods, 2) That Jesus Christ himself is the supreme God, and consequently not the Son of the supreme God, 3) By his death he reconciled and appeased God to sinners and satisfied his justice.

Stone showed considerable knowledge of the Trinitarian controversy of the Fourth Century. He made use of reason in his arguments, but in the last analysis he sought to base his case on the teachings of Scripture. Often he was feeling his way rather than dogmatically setting forth final conclusions. He was seeking an escape from the Trinitarian orthodoxy of Presbyterianism that set forth one God
who was three persons who were separate in their consciousness but one in their essence. At times he leaned toward Modalism—a modal Trinity of three persons who were no more than three ways in which a single undivided God works. At times he seemed to maintain that the Holy Spirit was "the power or energy of God, and never a third person in deity." He was sure that Christ was a separate personality before, during, and after his incarnation, and that Christ is not God if God is one. Christ was the Son of God and was to be honored but not worshipped.

The Father is the only true God, and Jesus Christ is his Son; both proper persons, both conscious agents—not one Being but two—not two self-existing, independent, equal Gods, for with us there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. The Son could say, "I came down from Heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." The Son and the Father were therefore not one Being, for each had a different will. The one was the sender and the other the sent. The Son was in Heaven with the Father, or else he could not have come down from Heaven.

Stone was strong and clear in his repudiation of the vicarious atonement of Presbyterian orthodoxy that maintained that the purpose of the atonement was to propitiate an angry Father by a sacrificial Son who is of the same substance or essence with the Father. Stone appealed to the writings of Ante-Nicene and Nicene Fathers and to lexicons and grammars. He resorted to reason to show the absurdity of the orthodox doctrine. His final appeal was to the Scriptures. He maintains that the Trinitarian dogma of the Confession of Faith did not come from Scripture but from human speculation. The relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was not revealed by God in Holy Scripture and it was beyond the power of man to explore by his natural reason.

When asked how he could deny that there are three persons in one God, he replied:

This query is founded on the supposition that we deny the trinity because of its mysteriousness . . . . No, sir, we deny the doctrine for better reasons, and the greatest of all is that it is not a doctrine of revelation . . . . All of God you love and adore is his character revealed; you know nothing more. His being or essence, or the mode of his existence, you know not . . . . That same character in God I love and adore; his being or essence I know not; It is not revealed, and therefore not necessary for us to know.

The controversy over the Trinity and Atonement produced a flood of pamphlets. About 1822 Blythe wrote Cleland, "Nothing could ever induce me to believe that the Presbytery of Orange ever would have licensed any man holding such abominable sentiments as Mr. Stone has recently avowed and now says that he had always held. Stone maintained that there had been considerable maturing of his understanding of the truth while he was a Presbyterian and that he had made great progress toward the truth since leaving the Presbyterians.

Robert W. Finley, once a Cane Ridge pastor, but who was forced out of the Presbyterian ministry for drunkenness, by 1816 had sobered up enough to join the
Methodists. He published in 1816 in Chillicothe, Ohio, a twenty-four page pamphlet entitled, A Short Dissertation on the Trinity in Unity, addressed to "Arians and Unitarians in the state of Ohio." Stone and the Christians were stirring up great controversy in Ohio. Finley declared that Stone and his associates in the Christian Church were:

... instead of helping precious souls on their way to heaven, are laying stumbling blocks and sophisms in the way of Zion's travelers, by eclipsing the native dignity and proper divinity of the Blessed Redeemer and the Holy Spirit .... As to the eternal Sonship, or filiation, how he was begotten of the Father, and how the eternal Three subsist in one undivided essence, I understand it about as much as how my soul and body subsist together, and how they two make one man; when my Unitarians explain one, I will explain the other .... I believe what God hath said of himself; you do not: May God have mercy on your poor little souls. The doctrine of the Trinity in unity has been considered as the foundation of the blessed gospel in every century of the Christian Era, by all ranks of men entitled to the Christian name, and is what I have ventured my poor naked soul upon; the belief of which for many years has kept me from sinking into despair under a complication of difficulties, and if this fails me I am gone forever. For I discover such a holiness in the divine law, and equity in the Lawgiver, and myself such a weak and hell deserving mortal, that by no means can I think myself safe or justifiable on any other account than that of an infinite satisfaction being offered to insulted justice on my account .... I have been astonished, when you consider the manner in which those have been treated in every age of the Christian Era that held the same tenets that you do, that you have the assurance to cry out, union, union, when you set aside the very principles on which they build their present, future and eternal happiness.

Stone strongly denied the charges of being Unitarian, Arian and Socinian. He said:

We Christians in the West have rejected the name Unitarian, Arian, and every other party name with equal abhorrence—and have settled on the divinity of the Scriptures, which, with regard to the Father and the Son, was received and believed by the Christians of the first centuries. From this divinity Arius departed and we think with him the generality of the existing sects in the present day, have far, very far, wandered.

In 1821 John R. Moreland, minister of the Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church near Cynthiana published an anti-Stone pamphlet filled with personalities and accusing Stone of double dealing. He compared him to a slippery snake and said, "A slippery snake must be held with a strong grip." Stone replied from Georgetown, November 21, 1821, that he had "slipped out of the chain forged in Westminster by which you and so many others are yet bound." Stone urged, "Always keep truth on your side and you will also be a slippery snake and wisely elude the grip of opposers."
Alexander Campbell in Kentucky

About 1823 the Kentucky Christians began meeting Reforming Baptists from Pennsylvania and West Virginia who were preaching ideas very much like their own.

On July 4, 1823, Alexander Campbell brought out the first issue of his Christian Baptist, a monthly periodical of eighteen pages. Campbell was pleading for the "Restoration of the Ancient Order."

On October 13, 1823, he started on horseback for Kentucky to meet in debate a Presbyterian minister, W. L. Macalla. The debate took place in Washington before a large audience and lasted from the fifteenth through the twenty-second of that month. After the debate he visited Mays Lick and Lexington. Many Kentuckians began reading Campbell's Christian Baptist. The Campbell-Macalla Debate appeared in book form, December, 1823. It was read with great interest by Kentucky Baptists. The Baptists were growing in Kentucky. With the circulation of the Christian Baptist and the Campbell-Macalla Debate Campbell's ideas of restoring Primitive Christianity spread among Kentucky Baptists.

In September, 1823, Alexander Campbell came to Kentucky for a tour lasting three months. He met John Smith and other leading Baptists of Kentucky and helped clarify issues and drew lines for those interested in reforming the Baptist churches. John Allen Gano reported that Campbell met Barton W. Stone at Georgetown. Gano said: "They conversed freely together, and were mutually led to love and highly esteem each other as brothers in the same heavenly family."

The Christian Messenger

In November, 1826, Barton W. Stone began publishing his Christian Messenger, a twenty-four page monthly. His correspondence had grown until it was impossible. Instead of trying to answer all the letters he would attempt a paper. It was printed in Georgetown and the subscription price was a dollar a year. Subscribers paid the postage which was a cent and a half per issue for subscribers living within a hundred miles of Georgetown. Beyond that it was two and a half cents. By the end of the first year Stone claimed a "liberal patronage." By 1829 Stone could claim that for three years he had about 2,000 subscribers but he was greatly in arrears financially and he plead with subscribers to pay for their subscriptions.

In his paper Stone dealt with issues that commanded a wide interest. He stated as the motto of the Christian Messenger, "Let the Unity of Christians be our polar star." Teaching about the plea for unity was a constant theme. Stone took up the discussion of the Trinity and Atonement in his paper. The paper was anti-slavery in sentiment. As early as 1800 Stone had written an anti-slavery resolution for the West Lexington Presbytery that was sponsored by his churches at Cane Ridge and Concord. By 1832 the anti-slavery sentiments in the Christian Messenger had caused most Louisiana subscribers to cancel their subscriptions. The state of Louisiana had passed "a very heavy law making it a hanging or penitentiary matter to encourage any publication in opposition to slavery." Stone was pressured to join in the spreading anti-Masonic campaign raging in Kentucky and Ohio. He replied:

The Messenger has been solicited before from Pennsylvania as well as Ohio to become an anti-masonic organ. It has refused
because of our total ignorance of that institution .... I am afraid that anti-masonry is designed to be a political engine; it may be to effect what it ostensibly proposes to put down. We as Christians should preach and live the gospel, and not interfere with things we know not.

Stone did speak out on the dress of women:

Outward ornaments, costly apparel, with a servile imitiation of the fashonables of Europe, however whimsical, ridiculous and extravagant, have fearfully absorbed the almost entire attention of our females, and keep their parents and husbands in perfect drudgery to support them. But little time can be devoted to the improvement of the mind, to the practice of religion, or to good economy of our earnings in distributing to the poor, or to religious purposes. These are evils of a serious nature, and loudly call for reformation, and this call must be attended to by all who profess the name of Christ, and take his word for their directory in practice. Not long since, I was at a religious meeting. The house and passage were literally crowded. Two ladies were entering the door with large hooped sleeves, in appearance four feet across, with glittering jewelry from their ears .... My attention was arrested to the extreme difficulty they had to encounter in passing through the crowd toward the pulpit—they had to walk sideways; and when they were seated, it was found that, though there was room sufficient for three their size, yet they could not sit in less than two feet of each other without annoying each other, and spoiling their hooped sleeves. The consequence was, that one or the other had to stand up during the time of worship. I pitied their folly; but abhorred their taste.

Stone's Messenger gave his movement a sense of unity and wholeness. It not only dealt with critical issues facing the churches, it gave news from the preachers and the congregations. It reported Church Conferences. Special attention was given to the results of evangelism and the establishment of new churches. It publicized coming meetings. It became the main source of information about the growth and progress of the churches. The paper gave Stone great visibility and made him the most influential personality among the Western Christians.

Christian Conferences

One aspect of the work of the churches that Stone felt called on to defend was the Christian Conferences. Some were not sure they could square the conferences with New Testament teaching. The conferences had been held from the very beginning of the movement and had grown in frequency and size. Stone received a report, "Many are under the impression that we associate with the purpose of legislating or making laws for the rule and government of our churches." Stone replied:

I am nevertheless constrained to believe that our conferences, as they are termed, with our present views of Christian liberty, are highly beneficial. It enables the brethren to ascertain the situa-
tion of each other, and each church to learn the prosperity of
God's cause; to meet and worship together; and to obtain a
variety of information important to be known . . . . We as a
conference meddle not with the government of the churches,
leaving each church to act according to the New Testament. We
have no other bonds of union, than the bonds of charity, and
peace and righteousness, founded on the word of God.

A conference letter in 1827 described and defended a Kentucky conference:

Our sole business is to confer together on the state of religion
among the churches, to arrange our appointments so as to supply
the churches which may need our aid in preaching, administering
ordinances, and attending to the ordination of elders, to worship
together, to strengthen the bonds of union, and to encourage
each other in the work of the Lord.

An Alabama preacher wrote to Stone about an Alabama conference:

No bishop was called to the chair, nor was any clergyman or lay
member chosen president. We entered no resolves upon our min-
ute book, nor did we take the name of an 'Advisory Council.'
But with one accord in one place we mutually engaged in arrang-
ing the appointments for our next annual meeting, so as to
promote the cause of the Redeemer.

The Growth of the Western Christians

No accurate statistics on the growth of the Western Christians are available
but one modern historian has estimated that by 1827 the Christians had about 12,940
members in seven states, as follows: Kentucky, 3,350; Tennessee, 1,800; Alabama,
600; Ohio, 4,390; Indiana, 1,200; Illinois, 600; Missouri 1,000. Another estimate gives
the number by 1832 at about 15,000, with something like 10,000 in Kentucky and
5,000 in Ohio.

Unity of the Christians and the Reformers

As the Christians (popularly called Stoneites) and the Reforming Baptists
(popularly called Cambellites) grew they had increasing contacts with one another.
More and more the two groups existed side by side in the same towns. The
Christians became aware of the growing numbers baptized by Walter Scott of the
Reforming Baptists in Ohio. Joseph Gaston, a Christian preacher in Salem, wanted
to convert Scott, and Scott wanted to convert Gaston. The Reforming Baptists ob-
jected to the open communion of the Christians. The Christians objected to the
closed communion of the Reforming Baptists. When they met to discuss their
differences they decided the dispute about communion was silly and unprofitable and
took each other as brothers.

In Millersburg, ten miles northeast of Paris, Kentucky, both groups existed.
After a time the two congregations began communing together at special meetings.
Finally finding themselves once in faith and practice they agreed to meet together
without regard to difference of opinion. They pledged themselves not to engage in
speculations to the wounding of each other, declaring that the gospel was the power
of God to salvation to all who would believe and obey it. In their church book they
added the note: "This was the first union so far as we know or believe had taken
place between the Christians and those called at that time Reformers."

John T. Johnson, a Baptist preacher and lawyer, was won to the plea of
Alexander Campbell in 1830. He tried to get the Great Crossings Church to adopt
the plea. When his church refused, he planted a new church beginning with only
three members. It soon grew to seventy. He was a neighbor to Barton W. Stone.
They became friends and shared a passion for Christian union. Stone said of
Johnson, "There is not a better man." They agreed "to affect a union between our
different societies." In November, 1831, Johnson invited Stone to hold a meeting in
his church. This led to an informal conference to discuss union. Stone and John
Rogers of the Baptists and John T. Johnson and John Smith of the Baptists met in
Georgetown. They decided to put the question of union to their congregations. If
the people agreed to union, Smith and Rogers would travel and preach union. Stone
and Johnson would write and preach union. They had no money but great faith. If
their people agreed, they would go. They declared:

We who have taken the work of God alone for our rule of faith
and practice, are the only people who dare speak out fearlessly.
We have no name to lose—already it is cast out as evil. We
have no salaries at stake—this might be a temptation to be
silent. We have no fear of offending our brethren, and fellow-
sufferers for the Kingdom of Christ, while we walk in the truth,
and keep within the Bible.

Stone, Johnson, Rogers, and Smith arranged four-day meetings for Georgetown
and Lexington—December 23-26 for Georgetown and December 30 - January 2 for
Lexington.

The meetings had no cut and dried agenda. There was fellowship and speech-
making. At Lexington Stone asked Smith to speak first. Smith stressed the impor-
tance of the union of Christians upon the one faith of the Bible. He denounced
speculations and the tyranny of opinions. He concluded:

Let us, then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stone-
ites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any other kind of lights, but
let us come to the Bible and to the Bible alone, as the only
book in the world that can give us all the light we need.

Stone responded with great tenderness and emotion. He declared that
Christians would never be one in specifications. They should confine themselves to the
language of the Bible. He turned to Smith and offered his hand. It was eagerly
grasped. The people clasped hands and as one brotherhood observed the Lord's
Supper. This union took place in January, 1832.

Stone said that "they were united by not written compact, no association, no
conventional constitution . . . . They were free to think for themselves . . . were
drawn together by the spirit of truth as taught by our common Lord, and expe-
rienced by us, the subjects of his kingdom." Stone declared, "This union, irrespective
of reproach, I view as the noblest act of my life." John Augustus Williams, one of
the preachers present at the meeting and close friend of Smith, said, "His co-
operation with Stone and Johnson in bringing the two parties together, John Smith always regarded as the best act of his life." John T. Johnson declared:

"What could we do but unite? We both compared notes. We found ourselves congregated on the same divine creed, the Bible. We had the same King—the same faith—the same law. We, reciprocally, had discarded all human speculations and opinions, as foreign to the gospel, and unworthy of serious attention of Christians. The name under which we rallied was the same. We could not do otherwise than unite in Christian love, fellowship, and effort in the glorious work of reform."

John T. Johnson joined Barton W. Stone as editor of the Christian Messenger to promote the spread of the union. They in their first joint editorial in the Christian Messenger gave an account of the "Union of Christians:"

We are happy to announce to our brethren, and to the world, the union of Christians in fact in our country. A few months ago the Reforming Baptists (known invidiously by the name of Campbellites), and the Christians, in Georgetown and the neighborhood, agreed to meet and worship together. We soon found that we were indeed in the same spirit, on the same foundation, the New Testament, and wore the same name, "Christians." We saw no reason why we should not be the same family. The Lord confirmed this union by his presence; for a good number was soon added to the Church. We agreed to have a four day meeting on Christmas in Georgetown, and on New Year's day in Lexington, for the same length of time. A great many Elders, Teachers, and Brethren of both descriptions assembled together, and worshipped together in one spirit, and with one accord. Never did we witness more love, union, and harmony, than was manifested at these meetings. Since the last meeting we have heard of the good effects. The spirit of union is spreading like fire in dry stubble.

It may be asked, is there no difference of opinion among you? We answer, we do not know, nor are we concerned to know. We have never asked them what were their opinions, nor have they asked us. If they have opinions different from ours, they are welcome to have them, provided they do not endeavor to impose them on us as articles of faith. They say the same of us. We hear each other preach; and are mutually pleased and edified.

It may be asked again—Have you no creed or confession as a common bond of union? We answer, yes. We have a perfect one, delivered us from heaven, and confirmed by Jesus and his Apostles—we mean the New Testament. We have learned from the earliest history of the church to the present time, that the adoption of man made creeds has been the invariable cause of division and disunion. We have, therefore, rejected all such creeds as bonds of union, and have determined to rest on that alone given by divine authority, being well assured that it will bind together all who live in the spirit of it.

It may again be asked—How will you dispose of such as profess faith in Jesus, and are baptized? To which party shall
they be attached as members? We answer: We have no party. It is understood among us, that we feel an equal interest in the prosperity of every Church of Christ, (and of such we all profess to be members) and are determined to build up and edify all such Churches, without any regard to former names by which they may have been called. To increase and consolidate this union, and to convince all of our sincerity, we, the Elders and brethren, have separated two Elders, John Smith and John Rogers, the first known formerly, by the name of Reformer, the latter by the name Christian. These brethren are to ride together through all the churches, and to be equally supported by the united contributions of the churches of both descriptions; which contributions are to be deposited together with brother John T. Johnson, as treasurer and distributor. We are glad to say, that all the churches, as far as we hear, are highly pleased, and are determined to co-operate in the work.

Some may ask—Will the Christians and Reformers thus united in other States and sections of our country? We answer—if they are sincere in their profession, and destitute of a party spirit, they will undoubtedly unite. They all profess the same faith—they all reject human creeds and confessions—they all declare that opinions of truth are fallible, and, therefore, should not be substituted for truth, nor embodied in an authoritative creed, written, or verbal; nor imposed as terms of fellowship among obedient believers. They all profess the same, one Lord, The Son of God, and Saviour of sinners—They all profess the same one immersion, into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—They profess all that our Lord Jesus and his Apostles and Prophets taught, and nothing more as of divine authority—in fact, we have just received intelligence from Elder John Longley of Indiana, that these people are also united in his bounds, and great are the blessings of the union. Many are added to the church. But should all in other states and sections act inconsistently with their profession, we are determined to do what we are convinced is right in the sight of God. Nothing can move us from this purpose, unless we should make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. From which may our merciful God preserve us.

EDITORS.

In 1844, looking back to that day of union, John Rogers said:

No one ever thought that the Reformers, so called, had come over to us, or that we had gone over to them; that they were required to relinquish their opinions, or we ours. We found ourselves contending for the same great principles of Christianity, and save the world . . . . I entered into it upon principle. I think immense good has grown out of it . . . .

The union of the churches proceeded congregation by congregation. The church formed by the union became one of the fastest growing churches in the New World. Wherever Barton W. Stone was well known by the members of this growing church he was loved and respected as a man of firmness, sweetness, and saintliness in character.