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Twelve Reasons Why I Stand Identified With The People Known As Disciples Of Christ

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TWELVE REASONS

Why I Stand Identified with the People Known as

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

By H. T. Morrison

1. They take the Bible alone as their rule of faith and practice. Nearly all other religious bodies hold to human creeds or confessions of faith, in addition to the Bible, and require men to subscribe to them before becoming members of their respective churches; and in this way the Bible is, to some extent, kept in the background, and the members of the church hindered from exercising their God-given freedom in the study of it. The man who subscribes to a human creed must study the Bible, less or more, through that creed, and, like the colored glasses one wears, the creed will give coloring to what he sees. Among the Disciples, the members are urged to study the Bible with the utmost freedom; and if the humblest member can learn some truth that has not yet been known, all the rest are bound to receive it.

2. They are the only people I have ever met who could give me a clear and satisfactory understanding of the Scriptures. Neither before nor since I identified myself with this people have I met a man, belonging to another religious body, who was able to point out, in a clear and satisfactory manner, the essential difference between the Old and New Testament, or between the Law and the Gospel, or who understood the seven grand divisions of the Bible. I had been under the ministry in other churches until I was a man grown, and never knew that some things in the Bible were addressed to Christians alone, and that others were addressed to those who were not Christians. After hearing the Disciples preach on these subjects, the book I had been reading all my life seemed almost like a new book.

3. They are the only people that demand of the sinner just what Christ and his apostles did, or that answer the enquirer in the exact language of the apostles. Such men as Moody and Mills and Harrison and Jones, and hundreds of other preachers, in the various denominations, never insisted, in their revival meetings, on the last commission given by the Saviour (Mark 16: 16). Who ever heard a preacher, except those among the Disciples, answer enquiring sinners as did Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 38) or as Ananias did the penitent Saul, in Damascus (Acts 22: 16)? These preachers seem to utterly ignore these Scriptures when they come in contact with men who want to know the way of life.

4. They aim to wear the names given to God's people in the Scriptures, and repudiate all sectarian names, believing them to be fruitful causes of the divisions now existing among God's people. Such a

rage has there been in modern times for human designations among God's people, that many are slow to see how a body of people, like the Disciples, can exist without some kind of human name; and have found much fault with us because we will not submit to be called Campbellites, or some other sectarian name.

5. They make nothing a test of fellowship but faith in the divine Saviour—true Scriptural faith that takes Christ at his word and obeys his commandments. One of the most vital mistakes ever made in the religious world, and that has done more to confuse and divide God's people than any one thing, was that of exalting human opinions, and making them tests of fellowship. The numerous human creeds in the world are scarcely more than the *opinions* of uninspired men, and should not be dignified by the name creed, much less bound upon men as tests of their loyalty to the Head of the church. The Christian system, strictly speaking, has but one article of faith in it, and that article relates to Jesus of Nazareth as a person and divine Saviour. He who believes with his heart so fully that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that he is willing to come under his authority, *has the faith of the gospel*. And to question him about much that is in the creeds would be to confuse him and make his way dark at a time when he needs the clearest light.

6. They have always believed that the existing divisions among God's people were wrong, and are contending earnestly for the overthrow of denominationalism, and for the union of God's people. And a very different state of things is now found in the religious world from that which existed three-quarters of a century ago, when the restoration for which we plead took definite shape. Then the most bitter strife existed among the various denominations, and many people went so far as to contend that division was a good thing, and was intended by God as a means of grace. It is only within the last twenty-five years that any one, in any other religious body, could be found who had the hardihood to come out squarely and oppose denominationalism, and contend for the union of God's people on the one foundation upon which Christ said he would build his church (Matt. 16: 18). The union of God's people has been a part of our plea, and for this we have ever contended with a zeal and a constancy that ought to challenge the respect and admiration of all thinking people. We have done the pioneer work in turning the current of the Protestant world in favor of Christian union. We have borne the burden and heat of the day in this contest, but, thank God, the fruits of our labors in this hard-fought battle begin to appear on every hand. The union sentiment that lingered so long has come at last, and come to stay. It is taking deep root in the hearts of God's people everywhere. The signs of the times fully indicate that the long, dark night of the apostasy is drawing to a close, and that it will not be very long until God's people will be marching, as one army, to the contest of the world.

7. The Disciples have done more in public debate to stop the mouths of infidels than any other people. Alexander Campbell, when comparatively a young man, stepped to the front and accepted the challenge of the bold infidel, Robert Owen, and triumphantly defended the Christian religion in public debate, when no other man in America

was willing to undertake the task. And since that time our preachers have met in public debate more opposers of the Bible than all other preachers combined.

8. They do not debar any one from the Lord's table who loves him and is trying to live a Christian life. They look at the family of God as being much larger than the people they represent. They are not so narrow in their views as to think none can be saved but those who are identified with them. They are neither what are called close nor open communionists. They say the table is the Lord's, and on that account all who are his children have a right there.

9. I believe their position on Christian baptism to be more Scriptural and reasonable than that of any other body of people. Baptism, with many, has been little more than a meaningless rite, in no way whatever connected with salvation. Many have claimed it to be a "non-essential." To many it has seemed to be a stone without any particular place in the great building of divine truth; and on this account some have gone so far as to entirely discard it. The Disciples believe that, to the proper subject, it is the initiatory rite into the kingdom of Christ; and that to such it holds the same relation as does the marriage rite to those who enter the marriage state. They do not believe there is any more *virtue* in the water or in the act than there was in the waters of Jordan, when the leper was commanded to go and wash seven times in that river. But they find it to be a positive command, coupled with faith in the last commission of our blessed Lord, and also found in every case of conversion that took place under the preaching of the inspired apostles. They believe the Saviour saw the necessity, before extending clemency to the penitent soul, of an outward and public surrender to him; and that, in making choice of an act for this purpose, baptism is one of the most expressive and appropriate he could have chosen. Why should it be thought a strange thing that Christ should demand some such test of his loyalty to Him before accepting the penitent sinner? If for no other reason, the penitent himself needs it. In this act he reaches out his hand, as it were, and accepts the proffered mercy. In this act the believer knows he has met the requirements of his Lord, and has the assurance that he is accepted of him. In this act he claims as his the promise, "He shall be saved."

As to the form of baptism, they hold, in common with all other Christian bodies, that immersion is baptism. It is true that many others hold that sprinkling and pouring will do, but none dispute immersion. It passes for baptism among all denominations, so that in this they stand upon common and undisputed ground.

10. I believe them to be more fully united in their belief on what may be called the essentials of religion, than any other people. It is true they have had some differences, as well as other people, but these have been about methods of work more than about matters of faith and doctrine. And these differences, too, are very largely things of the past. In our national conventions, where our people meet from almost all parts of the world, there is generally the utmost harmony. Our preachers, as a general rule, all speak the same things. Once in awhile some one gets away from the clear light of truth into the fogs of speculation; but his case is soon disposed of, and he drops out

of the ranks, giving us very little trouble. We have never had any case of discipline, like some of the older religious bodies, harassing the entire body for years, and finally causing a division.

11. They have never aimed at starting a new religion, or at simply adding another great denomination to the hundreds already in existence. What they have aimed at is a complete overthrow of denominationalism, and the return of the order of things that existed in the apostolic church, not only in spirit, but in faith and practice. Christianity was then pure, and the church undivided. But through the great apostasy, which gradually grew up in the absence of the apostles, Christianity has been greatly corrupted, and the religious world "made drunk with the wine of her fornication." They consider that the efforts of such reformers as Luther and Calvin and Wesley, and others, have fallen short of what they had in view. The noble work that these men did has to a great extent been neutralized by the formation of human creeds, which virtually say, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther," and by the formation of warring sects, built upon these creeds. What the Disciples propose, as the way out of this modern Babel, is to lay aside all human creeds and doctrines of men, all party names and human designations, and go back beyond modern partyism; beyond the reformers; beyond synods and councils; beyond the dark ages, back to the Christianity of the New Testament, and make all things according to the pattern therein shown by Christ and his holy apostles.

12. They have clearly shown the possibility of God's people uniting upon the Bible, without the assistance of human creeds. Many churches, with the best creeds in Christendom, have split again and again, while the Disciples have never had what may be called a split. During the late war, when men's souls were tried as never before, the Disciples, who were equally divided between the North and South, came out of that terrible ordeal an undivided people, something that could not be said of some of the older religious bodies. In the beginning of our movement, many of our religious neighbors ridiculed the idea of uniting people upon the Bible, without an interpretation of it in the form of a creed, which men would be required to subscribe to. They predicted that we would soon have all sorts of men preaching all sorts of doctrines, and that the whole fabric would soon drop to pieces. But at the end of about three-quarters of a century, nearly a million of communicants from various sources have been gathered together, and are as firmly united as any body of people in Christendom.

For further information, the following are recommended:

OUR POSITION, Isaac Errett.....	\$.05
FACTS CONCERNING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH, P. H. Welshimer.....	.05
PECULIARITIES OF THE DISCIPLES, B. B. Tyler.....	.10
FIRST PRINCIPLES, Isaac Errett. Cloth.....	.50
THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM, Alexander Campbell.....	1.00
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