**Stone and Campbell Unite**

The practice of adult immersion brought the Campbells into the awareness of the Baptists on the frontier. After much discussion, the Brush Run Church joined the Redstone Baptist Association in 1815. Alexander Campbell felt that any visible unity would be a step toward the ultimate unity of Christians. Although he didn’t agree with the Baptist Association on all points, he believed it better to be unified as part of the Association than to be an individual congregation disunified with all others. Soon their followers planted new congregations and Alexander became very well-known and influential through his work as a educator and publisher. In 1823, he began a monthly periodical called *The Christian Baptist*, in which he attacked traditional icons and institutions, especially the power of denominational clergy, and anything that stood in the way of NT Christianity and the unity of the Church.

His debating made Alexander a household name. In 1820, he faced Presbyterian ministers who argued for infant baptism. These debates, in their printed forms, were widely influential. Although the Campbells were initially against debating as it seemed counterintuitive to the idea of denominational unity, they were convinced that the publicity of them could be a positive way to help eliminate the false denominational teachings that prevent unity, thus unity would ultimately prevail.

The Campbell’s did not accept Baptist beliefs concerning the meaning of baptism and the role of a minister which caused the Baptist Associations to turn against them. The Campbell’s believed baptism to be the place where God forgives sins and adds a person to the kingdom, and that ministers were not equivalent to elders in authority. Some other Baptist ministers agreed with him and thus the BA dissolved itself in 1830. Numerous other Baptist Associations followed suit in VA, OH, and adjacent states.

The Campbell movement was now large and significant. Many of them preferred to simply be called Christians. Congregations often called themselves by a community name like the Brush Run Church. Sometimes the sign outside would say, “Church of Christ” or “Christian Church”. This variety of names was intentional. They did not want an exclusive sectarian name. Nevertheless, one name ultimately characterized these congregationally organized churches – Disciples of Christ.

Similarities between the Stone movement and these Disciples were so obvious that the two eventually united, but the process was not easy. Stone and Campbell agreed on a lot of ideas and respected one another. However, they had uneasiness between them as well. Campbell was a wealthy farmer and landowner but Stone lived on the edge of poverty. They had theological differences too. Stone believed Christianity was characterized by the spirit of Christ. The love, humility, patience, joy, etc., described as fruit of the Spirit. Only when believers embodied these virtues could we unite. Campbell, on the other hand, cried for return to the ancient order of things – the doctrines of the early Church. They were both committed to the Scriptures as the only source of spiritual life, light, and truth. Restoring the unified Church was the goal of both men.

In the 1820’s, members of both groups began asking why they weren’t united. In August 1831, Stone replied in *The Christian Messenger*. He said that there is no reason they shouldn’t unite since they are already one in spirit. The reluctance was on the part of Campbell. First, the Stone movement allowed unimmersed disciples to be members and commune. Campbell believed that unimmersed Christians could be saved if their error was based on simple lack of understanding and not rebellion, but membership in his congregations required immersion. Stone believed the same as Campbell but was more patient with those who did not yet understand. Second, Stone used the name “Christian” and Campbell preferred “Disciples”, which Stone admitted is a fine name. Campbell quickly responded that he would not ask Stone congregations to give up their name. However, there were other differences. Stone was opposed to the idea of trinity. Campbell believed that the sense of community and unity within God (three persons in one deity) was essential to Christianity and its community and unity. Stone had a relatively pessimistic view of humanity. Society as a whole was on a downhill slide that only the Second Coming could stop. Campbell was full of optimism. America was the place prepared by God for the restoration of the ancient order of things. After this restoration, all true Christians will come together, convert the world, and bring in the 1,000 year reign and peace and prosperity on Earth. The two also disagreed on evangelism and worship style. Stone was a proponent of revivals in which the Holy Spirit changed men’s hearts because of his experience at Cane Ridge. Campbell believed in calm, clear, rational teaching of the Gospel and that the Holy Spirit worked through the Word rather than dramatic events. Stone celebrated Communion infrequently while Campbell observed it weekly. Stone believed in ordained elders serving communion and Campbell’s congregations were quite anti-clergy and much more democratic about who could do what in worship services.

Meeting between the two movements that ended on January 1, 1832 finally resulted in unity. Racoon John Smith was one of the leaders of the Campbell movement in KY. He spoke in these meetings about how God has only one people on Earth and the Bible exhorts them to be one. Even issues like the trinity and communion were less important than fellowship. “No heaven is promised to those who hold one position or the other, and no hell is threatened to those who deny them…Both groups should stop making deductions and inferences from Scripture into requirements for fellowship…There should be more love for one another…Let us then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stonites, New Lights or Old Lights or any other kind of lights, but let us come to the Bible and the Bible alone, as the only book in creation that can give us the Light we need.” (Holloway and Foster pgs. 58-59). The next day, Sunday, both groups in KY met together and took Communion as one family. A month after this wonderful service, there was a Sunday when no elders were present. The Stone followers didn’t want to take Communion. The Campbell followers found this ridiculous, so they decided to separate once again. It was three years later when they reconciled again permanently.