

ISSUE

17.31

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

August 9,  
2015

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Kyle Pope

## Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Jack Langley

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



## Religious Traditions or Biblical Principles?

By Kyle Pope

On March 17, 2015 brother Nathan Pickup posted an article on *Focus Online* entitled “Diversity of Opinion and Biblical Authority.”<sup>1</sup> His words generated some dramatic feedback on the part of readers from several different perspectives. I do not know Nathan, although I knew his father, and have great respect for his family. I have read and appreciated studies he has written from time to time, and I agreed with many elements of what he wrote in that article. He did, however, express a few ideas that caused me great concern and I have written and talked with him about these concerns. The wise man taught, **“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend”** (Prov. 27:17, NKJV). In that spirit I offer this article to contribute to the “dialogue” which bro. Pickup said in his article he hoped his study would motivate.

If I understand what bro. Pickup was trying to say I think his main point was (to use the Holy Spirit’s wording) **“test all things, hold fast to what is good”** (1 Thess. 5:21). That is clearly a biblical principle. If we do not test our beliefs and practices Peter’s warning may be fulfilled in us—**“beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked”** (2 Pet. 3:17). I think bro. Pickup, however, may have done what I hear many of us doing a little too much these days—challenging our brethren’s thinking by using language that almost alienates those with whom we agree. That’s like a military garrison trying

<sup>1</sup> Pickup, Nathan. “Diversity of Opinion and Biblical Authority” *Focus Online* (March 17, 2015), <http://focusmagazine.org/diversity-of-opinion-and-biblical-authority.php>.

to improve marksmanship by targeting its own fellow soldiers! We might do better to first accentuate our common convictions before challenging each other to “sharpen” our thinking on a subject in ways that could seem to undermine core beliefs.

Bro. Pickup began his article by considering what puzzles many of us—*how can people who claim to respect Bible authority reach such different conclusions?* He offered three great points that he argued explain this tendency:

1. “All of us interpret Scripture through the lens of our life circumstances.”
2. “All of us interpret Scripture in light of our ‘pre-understandings.’”
3. “All of us interpret Scripture in light of our religious tradition.”

There is a lot of truth in these words. If we are not careful, life experience affects how we view things and conclusions we are willing to draw. This was the error of the rich young ruler who was not willing to surrender his wealth (Luke 18:18-23). Preconceptions can color how we see the very words of Scripture. We see this in the Jews’ expectation of a physical rather than a spiritual messianic kingdom (Acts 17:20-21). There is also no question that our religious background (or lack thereof) can have a tremendous impact on our interpretation of Scripture. This problem caused the Athenian philosophers to miss the truth when their unwillingness to consider the resurrection made them close their ears to the gospel (Acts 17:32). Matters such as these are factors we regularly seek to help new converts overcome so that we all may be **“rightly dividing the word of truth”** (2 Tim. 2:15).

I really believe bro. Pickup was trying to urge us simply to guard against these same dangers whether we are new to Christ or have been Christians for many years. However, under his third point on “religious tradition” bro. Pickup made some comments I would urge him to “sharpen” and refine. He wrote:

Churches of Christ, while non-denominational, are a result of a movement that started with Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone who sought to get local churches to adhere to New Testament patterns.

This confuses the historical movement with the objectives it espoused. “Churches of Christ” did not “result” from the Campbell-Stone movement. The Lord’s Church was established on the Day of Pentecost and has been in existence from that time (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47 [maj. mss]; 5:11). Men and women within this movement who determined to return to biblical patterns simply accepted the biblical principles that:

- 1) God is not pleased with division (John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10).
- 2) It is possible to be a part of the church taught in the New Testament (Dan. 2:44; Eph. 3:21; 4:4).
- 3) Following and restricting one’s self to what the New Testament reveals about the Lord’s Church allows one to be what New Testament Christians were (Acts 2:39; 1 Tim. 3:15; Phil. 4:9).



These are not Campbell-Stone “traditions.” They are biblical principles some within that movement came to recognize. To use this wording makes it sound as if “churches of Christ” is a designation *started* by the Campbell-Stone movement rather than a biblical way of referring to congregations composed of members of the Lord’s church. He went on to say:

Those of us who worship at a local church of Christ are a result of that movement, and we are still being carried along by the current of its continuous stream.

Bro. Pickup was probably trying to say that many of us in America who are members of congregations that identify ourselves simply as “churches of Christ” have been influenced by the attitudes and objectives of the Campbell-Stone movement. That is certainly true, but let’s think a little bit about this.

Paul told the brethren in Rome—“**the churches of Christ greet you**” (Rom. 16:16). His words show there were churches of Christ in the first century—1800 years before Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone! Can churches today be what these churches were? Yes, by doing what they did! Further, there have been those throughout history that have identified themselves with this biblical (although not exclusive) name for the Lord’s church.<sup>2</sup> Did all of these follow biblical patterns? Not necessarily—although some undoubtedly did. Finally, we must recognize that not all churches today who claim some tie to the Campbell-Stone movement call themselves “churches of Christ” and even among those who do, not all follow biblical patterns or strive to be simply the Lord’s church as taught in the New Testament. Some use “Church of Christ” as if it is a denominational name such as Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, or Presbyterian. What determines a congregation’s soundness and identification with the Lord’s church has nothing to do with its claim to any Campbell-Stone tradition, but everything to do

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<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament we can find reference to “**churches of Christ**” (Rom. 16:16) or the “**church of God**” (I Cor. 1:2) and even the “**church of the Firstborn**” (Heb. 12:23), but these all describe those people who by their faith and obedience to Jesus belong to God in Christ.

with its adherence to biblical patterns and teachings.

What caused me the most concern in bro. Pickup’s study were some words that came immediately after those quoted above. He wrote:

The “five steps of salvation” and the hermeneutic of “command, example, and necessary inference” are two ripples from the movement that are still felt in local churches.

This makes it sound as if the Campbell-Stone movement somehow *invented* the concept that hearing the gospel (Acts 4:4; Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 5), faith and confession of Jesus (Rom. 10:8-11; Heb. 11:6; Matt. 10:32-33), repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins are necessary for salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Luke 13:3; 1 Pet. 3:21). It is true that Walter Scott, a prominent preacher within this movement, became well-known for his “five-finger” sermons addressing each of these elements. To give the impression, however, that these things are just “traditions” is like saying that Isaac Newton *invented* gravity. Newton simply identified, explained, and taught about a scientific principle that had existed from the beginning.



The terms “command, example, and necessary inference” may be a way of describing how to establish biblical authority that owes its particular etymology to the Restoration Movement, but not its conceptual origin. If Jesus now possesses “**all authority**” (Matt. 28:18), and has commissioned His apostles to make disciples commanding them to observe “**all things**” He commanded them (Matt. 28:19-20), we may conclude that the commands of Christ through His apostles are binding. Since men such as Paul, an apostle

of Jesus, taught disciples to do the things they “**learned and received and heard and saw**” in him, so that “**the God of peace will be with**” them (Phil. 4:9)—disciples today must follow these same examples to be in fellowship “with” God. Finally, if Scripture is something that can be *read* and *understood* (Eph. 3:4) it can be discerned as we do any written text. Jesus, for example, drew an inference from Exodus 3:6 concerning the reality of the resurrection from God’s description of Himself as “**the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**” (Matt. 22:32). Paul drew the necessary inference from God’s promises to Abraham’s “**Seed**” not “**seeds**” that it was a direct messianic reference (Gal. 3:16). If Jesus and Paul used Scripture this way we too must study the inescapable conclusions demonstrated in the wording of Scripture to determine doctrine and practice. These are not Campbell-Stone “traditions,” but fundamental biblical principles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bro. Pickup read this article before its publication in *Focus Online* on April 2, 2015 and asked me to clarify that it was not his intention to make it sound as if the “five-steps” of salvation or the concept of “command, example, and necessary inference” are simply traditions. He agrees that these are fundamental biblical principles.



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🕒 **Let us know if you have any questions.**