

Thomas Campbell and the Principles He Promulgated

by Clinton Lockhart

The sermon highlights the principles and legacy of Thomas Campbell, including his personal experience with the partisan spirit, the invaluable truth that sectism is sin, and the discovery that Christians are free from ecclesiastical domination.

Scripture: John 3:16, Acts 2:42, Romans 15:5, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 4:3

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Ecclesiastical Freedom"

Description

Clinton Lockhart preaches about the valuable inheritance left by Thomas Campbell to free, intelligent, and philanthropic disciples of Christ, emphasizing the importance of unity, freedom from ecclesiastical domination, and the rediscovery of apostolic terms of fellowship. The sermon highlights Mr. Campbell's personal experiences with religious divisions, the sin of sectism, the freedom of religious opinion, the definition of essential faith for salvation and fellowship, and the proposed basis of Christian union based on faith in Jesus and obedience to His commands.

Transcript

Luna Park, Saturday Morning, October 16.

A free people may become the heirs of unlimited fortunes. Slaves inherit nothing. An intelligent people will appreciate and enjoy an inheritance which the foolish, despising, will quickly cast away. Philanthropic people will share their possessions with their fellow-men to the end that all may be blest. Disciples of Christ, free, intelligent and philanthropic, have never failed gratefully to appreciate and liberally to dispense the patrimony which has been left them by Thomas Campbell.

Since the appreciation of this heritage has steadily advanced through a whole

C. LOCKHART.

century, and a widely distributed people esteem themselves wealthy in its possession, it is eminently fitting that we should take at least a conservative inventory of its values.

1. One of the most valuable parts of this estate is Mr. Campbell's personal experience with the partisan spirit of his time. Being a man of fraternal disposition, it was to him a matter of grief that Christian people,

and especially those of his own order, should engage in religious wrangles, and, by refusing Christian fellowship one to another, produce divisions and multiply sects.

After his arrival in America he found along the Allegheny River Presbyterians of several parties scattered like sheep without a shepherd, and suggested to them a common participation in the Lord's Supper, but for this "informality" he was tried before his presbytery and censured. He appealed to the synod, but the synod, though overruling some irregularity of the presbytery, only repeated the censure. He meekly bore it, but soon discovered that his fellow-ministers were more than ever pursuing him with envy and suspicion. "He became fully satisfied that nothing but their want of power prevented them from carrying out their persecution to the utmost limit, and he was led, more and more, toward the conclusion that bigotry, corruption and tyranny were qualities inherent in all clerical organizations." Well did the Saviour denounce "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

All this came on, not because he had been untrue to any point of Christian faith, or even to the particular creed of his party, and least of all on account of any deflection in moral character, but because of liberal sentiments toward members of other churches and a readiness to unite with them on the simple gospel of Christ as contained in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, so constant and so insistent was this hostility against him that he was compelled to withdraw from the synod and sever his connection with the Seceder Church. By the sad experience of some soul, the people must learn the necessity of throwing off that silent ministerial despotism by which the whole church was deprived of its sacred liberties. Grief and suffering can teach lessons which joy and prosperity can not [360] inculcate. One of these is the lesson of atonement for hidden sins.

2. Another item in our estate is the invaluable truth that sectism is sin. Mr. Campbell learned this from Scripture as well as from real life. On this he could not be mistaken. Did not the Saviour pray for union among his followers, and this, too, that the world might believe? Did not Paul, to the Galatian church (Gal. 5:19-21), set forth strife, jealousy, wraths, factions, divisions and parties along with drunkenness, fornication and idolatry as works of the flesh? And did not he say that those who practice such things can not inherit the kingdom of God? How, then, could sectarianism be a virtue?

Mr. Campbell urged that there was no occasion for this sin to find a place in the American churches, since nearly all the customs, political questions and other bars of fellowship by which the divisions arose, had their origin across the Atlantic, and could find no fitness to conditions on Western soil.

3. A third and very important part of this legacy is the discovery that in opinions Christians are and ought to be free from ecclesiastical domination. The greatest discovery of modern times is the human mind. The power of independent thought, and especially that of the well-trained intellect, is at present one of the richest assets of the world's fortune.

But why should there be liberty of religious opinion? Of course, there is room for scientific discovery, for philosophical insight, for political and historical research, because these are open and legitimate fields of inquiry; but religion, especially the Christian religion, is fixed, is divine, a matter of revelation. How can there rationally be any variety in its teaching or new results of research? We must not forget that the enemy can not be restrained from putting Christianity to the severest test; and the Christian, compelled to enlist in its defense, is forced to pursue his antagonist even upon the most hallowed ground.

But is it not the duty of the church to be loyal to God and to its convictions? The church is composed of individuals, and it is the duty of each individual to be loyal, and the duty of the church to allow each

individual the freedom of his convictions. But when the church for generations has, by common consent, agreed upon a statement of faith, is not dissent by one man or a few disloyalty to the church? The same principle was once urged by the state: if the state formulates a doctrine, is it not disloyalty for the church to dissent? Of what value is it that the mind be free from the state, if it must at last be enslaved to the church? But it is asked, What right have the few to assert their opinions against those of the many? They have the right of discovery, the right which the world accords to Copernicus, who,

H. W. COLE.

in 1543, announced that the earth and other planets revolve around the sun, though the many, with the Bible in hand, advocated a contrary opinion; the right of Columbus, who, in the face of popular derision and royal rebuff, persisted in holding to the globular form of the earth; and the right of Galileo, who, in 1616, was condemned by theologians and warned by the pope for holding to the rotation of the earth and the stability of the sun, and who was regarded only as a stubborn heretic for seeming to reject the Bible, which spoke of "the ends of the earth" and its "four corners." It is the right that Isaiah and Jesus and Paul exercised, and has been accorded, though with great reluctance, by theologians, to scientists. This right has laid the foundations of our present civilization, and has paved the pathway of the world's best progress.

4. But our legacy is enriched by another asset of great value. Mr. Campbell was among the first to insist upon a careful definition of the limits of the faith essential to salvation and to fellowship. It is notable that one hundred years ago no two denominations proposed the same doctrines as constituting the true and essential faith. There [361] was no distinction between the faith that saves and opinions that temporarily satisfy a religious party. At the same time, discussion, dissension and denunciation were more ardent and bitter over some variation in Christian thought than over the fundamental issues between Christianity and heathenism!

Under such conditions religious toleration, though adopted and cherished by the state, was disowned and spurned by the church! The church occupied the unenviable position of having decried persecution by the state, and reserved it for itself!

It was the inestimable work of Mr. Campbell to distinguish the one article of faith required for Christian fellowship under the apostolic ministry, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God. This was the fundamental thesis of the early evangelism, the distinguishing tenet of the first disciples, and the very essence of Christian teaching. It put the believer in an attitude to learn. Honest conviction, when erroneous, was corrected by kindly argumentation, and denunciation was reserved for evil men, gainsayers and factionists. "He that believeth hath eternal life."

5. Another feature of this wonderful legacy is the rediscovery of the apostolic terms of fellowship. The early Christians set forth two conditions of admission to their confidence and association--faith in Jesus as the Messiah and implicit obedience to his commands; but during the Middle Ages they were concealed by the dissensions of Protestants over theological trifles, and upon them disputed dogmas and denominational customs were superimposed.

Mr. Campbell brushed aside all this medieval and modern rubbish, and laid bare the original foundations of fellowship. He made clear the fact that a recognition of the true terms of fellowship will bring to the church fraternity, peace and progress.

6. One part of this rich legacy still awaits appraisal--a proposed basis of Christian union. Mr. Campbell reasoned that if exclusion from fellowship can be based only on unbelief in the Messiahship of Jesus or disobedience to his commands, then the great majority of Christians may be united upon simple faith and obedience. Let the Scriptures alone mark the common pathway of personal and congregational conduct; and beyond these apostolic advices, uniformity, further than common consent will secure and Christian love will prompt, will be unnecessary.

Mr. Campbell was the first of modern men to discover that the essentials of Christian fellowship are already matters of common acceptance with the majority of Protestant Christians.

It may be that our conservative spirit will long delay complete union, but the plea is no less prophetic and precious. Many of the ideals of Hebrew seers, though they stood by the very fountains of inspiration, are yet but partially realized. So it may take generations of experience and thought to reach Christian unity and liberty; but the final ideal, clear, inspiring and inviting, is more precious than the jewels of mountains and seas.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/clinton-lockhart/thomas-campbell-and-the-principles-he-promulgated/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net