

Reflections on the “*Restoration Summit*”

Dub McClish

On August 7-9, 1984, a meeting billed as a “Restoration Summit” was conducted at Joplin, Missouri. The “Summit” was first conceived and suggested by brother Alan Cloyd of Nashville, Tennessee, in a 1983 issue of *Restoration Leadership Quarterly*. As he proposed in that issue, the “Summit” consisted of a meeting between 50 men from the churches of Christ and 50 men from the Independent Christian Churches. (Brother Cloyd left the Independent Christian Church and identified himself with us several years ago.) The dual purpose of this meeting was to discuss the matters that divide the two fellowships from each other and to explore the possibilities of uniting the two groups. The meeting was conducted on the campus of Ozark Bible College. The 100 men from both groups were “hand-picked” by those who planned the “Summit,” thus the program was attended by “invitation only.”

Background of the “Summit”

A few words of explanation concerning the identity of the “Independent Christian Church” are necessary (this is the designation that most of their 50 men at the “Summit” preferred). These churches are not affiliated (nor do they wish to be confused or identified) with the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church. Their choice of the adjective “Independent” is intended by them to indicate the distinction. When their speaker who was assigned to make this distinction clear neglected to do so, another one of their men was later assigned a special place on the program to point this out. They did not want any doubts left about the matter. The objections they raised against the Disciples/Christian Church as reasons for having no fellowship with them are many of the very same objections most of us hold – theological liberalism, indiscriminate ecumenism, open membership, and such like.

What are the principal differences between the Independent Christian Church and us? There are apparently three:

1. Use of mechanical instruments of music in worship,
2. Use of missionary organizations and associations distinct from local churches for evangelistic work
3. Use of women in leadership roles in the worship and work of local churches.

However, the real problem behind these matters relates to their attitude toward scripture and how to establish scriptural authority. While most of these congregations are

identified by the name "Christian Church," there are many such congregations (especially in the midwestern and north central states) that use the name "Church of Christ." These Independent Christian Churches have their roots in the restoration efforts of the Campbells, Stone, et al. They were among those who were carried away by the innovations of the missionary society and the instrument in the last half of the 19th century. Division eventually took place, congregation by congregation, between those who favored these innovations and those who held to the simple and primitive pattern of singing with no instruments and allowing only the church to do the work of evangelism. This tragic division was recognized by separate statistics for the respective groups in the federal census of 1906.

Those who thus departed have since become two separate groups. The Disciples of Christ/Christian Church has marched deliberately and openly into full-fledged theological liberalism and denominationalism. The Independent Christian Church has maintained a comparatively conservative stance concerning inspiration and revelation, the plan of salvation, and such like, but not with the role of women and the use of instruments and missionary organizations. (For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as the "Conservative Christian Church" as distinguished from the "Disciples.") These two separate groups have no organic ties and little fellowship with each other.

The format of the "Summit" was a combination of lectures, followed by dispersal into 10 groups of 10 men each for discussion of the lecture content and related matters. Each group had a chairman and a reporter who gave periodic reports of the discussion in each respective group to the entire assembly.

Sources of Information

I did not attend the "Summit," but I have viewed the eight hours plus of video tapes that recorded the main speeches and the reports of the discussion groups. I have listened a second time and even more to some of the speeches. I have also had a lengthy telephone conversation with brother Alan Cloyd who planned the "Summit" and with one of our brethren who spoke on the program, as well as with a third participant. Additionally, I have heard taped reports and/or read written reports from five other brethren who attended this program and have conversed in person with one brother who was present. With this background I offer the following observations and impressions of the "Summit."

Review of the Speeches

The first speaker was brother Monroe Hawley on the subject, "History and Current Profile of Churches of Christ." He presented an interesting summary of Restoration history. He emphasized that he was speaking only for himself and that he would likely say some things with which other members of the church would disagree. While in the main I found myself in accord with his speech, there were some insinuations and observations voiced which I believe were unfounded and unnecessary, to say nothing of harmful. He joined the ranks of those among us who have of late taken delight in reproaching the Lord's church for its alleged "sectarian" attitude. He first said that in choosing the distinctive names "Church of Christ" and "Christian Church," respectively, as the division became a reality, a sectarian attitude was manifested. This we deny concerning the designation Church of Christ, since it is innately scriptural (Rom. 16:16; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22,23, et al. I would agree that "Christian Church" is in fact a sectarian name. Brother Hawley also listed a "sectarian spirit" in Churches of Christ as one of his greatest concerns. If he is talking about a growing tendency to make the church into nothing more than a sect or denomination, indistinguishable from the patchwork of denominational ideology, I would agree with his concern. But if he is talking about the efforts of those who are bold and strong in the proclamation of the truth and the exposure of error (which seemed to be his reference), I strongly disagree. The church was restored and continues to maintain its distinctiveness and exclusiveness only by powerful and plain preaching and defense of the truth (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Jude 3; etc.). Such is not "sectarianism" but the very opposite.

Brother Hawley listed some "promising signs" among us. First, he mentioned a deep commitment to the authority of the Word of God. Then he indicated his wish that we were more committed to Christ, saying that we are generally more committed to the Bible than to Christ and that the two are not the same. However, one of *my* greatest concerns is a *lack of* commitment to the authority of God's word. A large-scale failure to seek authority in the word for both doctrine and morals is perhaps our major problem at present. This distinction between our commitment to Christ and to the Bible is theological doubletalk. One cannot separate loyalty to Christ from loyalty to his word. Christ exercises his authority only through his word and one who is deeply committed to his word is, by definition, deeply committed to Christ. If to reject the word of Christ is to reject Christ himself (John 12:48), it must follow that to honor and respect his *word* is to honor and respect *him*. Brother Hawley's statement plays into the hands of those who like to call Jesus "Lord, Lord" without honoring his word (Luke 6:46).

Brother Hawley decried the spirit of contentiousness he sees in the church and apologized to the Christian Church men for it. He assured them that it was only a “small vocal minority” that was making a noise all out of proportion to its size through certain journals. He said he did not question the integrity of these contentious brethren, but then immediately proceeded to charge them with a lack of love. It seems that he had difficulty deciding whether to judge or not judge their motives.

The next speaker, Boyce Mouton, was assigned to speak on the “History and Current Profile of Independent Christian Churches.” He was a very entertaining speaker, telling many humorous anecdotes and drawing many laughs. However, he rarely got even close to his subject. In fact, he failed to such an extent, especially in drawing a distinction between the Independents and the Disciples, that another speaker was added to the program and given a special assignment to do this very thing. One statement made by Mouton especially caught my attention. He referred to the prophecy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-33) and stressed that it was not written on paper or stone, but on the heart. I do not know anything about Mouton except what I heard in his introduction and his speech, but this seemed to be a statement impossible to harmonize with any great measure of respect for the *written* word.

Furman Kearley spoke next on “Exegesis and Hermeneutics as They Relate to the Unity Question,” emphasizing that unity depends upon correct and unified exegesis and hermeneutics. He strongly emphasized the truths that what God has bound we must bind and that we must not bind what God has loosed. I appreciated his speech and wholly agreed with its content, but I could not keep from wishing he had used this great opportunity to emphasize the authority of the silence of Scripture and the Scriptural law of exclusion by positive command as these laws relate to the instrument and to missionary organizations. To my disappointment, brother Kearley expressed agreement with a most dangerous suggestion from brother Wayne Kilpatrick in their first small group discussion. More about this later.

The next speaker was Fred Thompson who was assigned to speak on the same subject as brother Kearley from the Independents’ perspective. About the best that can be said for his speech is that it was a waste of everyone’s time, including those who invited him, by *their own admission*. He came up with such gems as the following: “We are united in confession of Jesus, not in hermeneutic agreement” and “every text must be understood in reference to, not necessarily in agreement with, every other text.” He suggested that the main thing about the Bible is that it is a “story.” He affirmed that Genesis 1-3 might be true without being historical.

He suggested that we needed and had available the illumination of the Holy Spirit as we read the Bible. He labored to impress everyone with his scholarship by the use of high-sounding, “hip” theological terms and phrases, but he failed. More than one of the study groups reported their questions concerning and disagreements with what he had said. I gathered that he was not at all representative of the Independents present for the occasion and that they were somewhat ashamed of his speech.

“Authority – Where Does it End?” was the topic assigned to Hardeman Nichols. This was the strongest speech and the most to-the-point speech of the “Summit.” Brother Nichols filled his speech with Scripture which exalted the authoritative nature of God’s will. He correctly pointed out that while the Bible contains the story of redemption, it is not merely a “story” (a la Fred Thompson), but rather is a book of authoritative law. He placed powerful emphasis on the authority of the silence of Scripture, using illustrations from both Testaments. He correctly emphasized that authority ends with what Christ authorizes and that we dare not presume upon the silence of Scripture. The principles so well prepared and presented in this speech would completely remove the barriers to fellowship that separate these brethren from us, if they would but apply them, for neither instruments in worship nor missionary organizations can stand before these Biblical principles of authority. However, once again, the application to these issues could have and should have been much more pointed and specific, in my judgment.

Immediately following brother Nichols, W.F. Lown of the Christian Church spoke on “Liberty – Where Does it Start?” He advanced the thesis that “silence gives us freedom to speak” and “liberty begins where Scripture stops.” In areas of silence, he advocated following “consensus fidelism,” a sort of majority opinion of “the faithful.” These represent the typical responses and arguments of those who would justify their additions to the practices or organization of the New Testament church. I suggest that these principles so “lower the fences” of God’s authority as to render them non-existent. Where does Scripture speak of the counting of beads, the use of “holy water,” the baptism of infants or the use of cookies and milk on the Lord’s table? If “silence gives us freedom to speak” then these and 1,000 things like them must be accepted without protest. Are not those in the Independent Christian Churches generally too conservative to accept such inevitable consequences of such a liberty principle?

The “consensus fidelism” principle is somewhat of an application of the situation ethics principle applied to doctrine. Both the time span and geographical area under consideration

would greatly affect any consensus. And who is to decide who "the faithful" are? Does not this principle leave doctrinal authority resting on the shifting sands of human judgment and subjectivism?

The final major speaker was brother Reuel Lemmons whose topic was "Where *Can/* Where *Do* We Go from Here?" Sadly, the self-contradictions that have become his trademarks over the past few years were much in evidence in his speech. He implied that the issues which divide us are really only matters of personality and opinion by calling them "spite fences" which we have built "sky high." Did the Christian Church men understand him to be referring to our rejection of such things as the instrument and missionary societies? He likened us unto sectarian groups of the 18th and 19th centuries out of which men came in answer to the Restoration Plea. He generously applied sectarian to the Lord's church. (Really, hasn't this charge been overworked just a bit by those who have jumped on the latest unity bandwagon?) Brother Lemmons accused us of converting people to our "cause" and our "clan" rather than to Christ, a charge which bears a marked resemblance to the old "man, not the plan" insistence of some loose-thinking brethren of 25 years ago. He harshly criticized our "shallow understanding of baptism" and our desire to be a separate religious body!

Space forbids discussing many other things in brother Lemmons' speech, including some misapplications of scripture which resulted in some absurd implications, especially pertaining to the Lord's supper. He advanced the idea that unity *already exists* between the two groups because members of both groups have been born again and all that is left is for us to acknowledge said unity! In fact, he said that those who do not recognize this unity commit sin. It should be obvious to even a spiritual neophyte that brother Lemmons has confused the fact of being brethren with a state of unity. I have no hesitancy to call those who have obeyed the gospel plan of salvation in the Christian Church my brethren, but this in no way is tantamount to unity or fellowship between us. If unity already exists, why was a "Summit" meeting needed to discuss how to achieve unity? Incidentally, brother Cloyd told me in a telephone conversation that he thought this speech was "outstanding."

Some plans and suggestions for the future have been formulated. One report is that a meeting is scheduled to coincide with the Abilene Christian University Lectureship in February 1985. Another report indicates that a meeting is scheduled for March of 1985 in Tulsa. And there has been some talk of having annual "Summit" meetings "as long as they are needed."

Some Observations and Suggestions

All men who love the Lord and his word would surely encourage and applaud any move toward unity that is earnestly and uncompromisingly based on the authority of the Bible. However, I must confess to having some serious reservations about this "Summit" and its successors for several reasons.

First, I am concerned about the type of men who were invited, for the most part. There were some unquestionably solid men in attendance, but they were decidedly in the minority (perhaps 5 or 6 out of 50). Upon inquiring of brother Cloyd how our participants were selected, he said it was by an "ad hoc committee." He added that the main concern was that "good, sound Gospel preachers" were there. I have some difficulty with his understanding of these terms! True, there were a few such men present, but very few. Several of the men were those who over the past few years have been in the forefront of a revived "unity" movement and whose sounds of softness and uncertainty on the "Crossroads Philosophy," baptism, fellowship and even the use of instruments in worship have caused widespread concern. Several others were there (at the recommendation of the ones just mentioned) who have not been as outspoken as these men, but who have not exactly distinguished themselves for their doctrinal soundness. One of our brethren who participated, and with whom I talked, told me that he came away feeling that there were more of our men present who would be willing to compromise and use the instrument than there were men from the Christian Church who would be willing to give the instrument up. He came away from Joplin in distress over what the "Summit" portends for the church.

A case in point is brother Rubel Shelly's view that those who use the instrument do not have to renounce it as wrong and sinful; all they need do is lay it aside as a barrier to unity. From a taped speech in Memphis in late 1983 or early 1984, I quote:

I think of a brother of mine for example. He preaches for a group that calls itself the Christian Church. A while back he came to the conclusion that he was willing to give up that instrument, not because he believed it was wrong. He wasn't convinced of that yet, but for the sake of unity, so that the body of Christ in that area where he was working -he could give that up (He) went to the preachers' meeting in that town and five preachers in town, four of the five said that wasn't good enough. He had to renounce it as wrong and sinful. Maybe the four handled it correctly. I don't think so!

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My question is this: what point was there in brother Shelly's meeting with those who use the instrument, purportedly to convince them that its use is wrong, when he does not

believe they have to acknowledge the sinfulness of its use in order to have full fellowship with us? It seems to me that brother Cloyd bent so far over backward to get men who would in no wise offend the instrumentalists that he invited several men who would be willing to treat the instrument as a matter of expediency and opinion. At least two other participants (Calvin Warpula and Bill Minick) have publicly stated since the "Summit" that they do not believe use of the instrument in worship is a damnable practice.

My second concern has to do with those who were not invited. Were just enough conservative and unquestionably sound men invited to give a token representation and to forestall expected criticism because of the number of less-than-conservative brethren who were invited? Only brother Cloyd can answer. Sam Stone, editor of the *Christian Standard* (prominent journal of the Independents), was invited. Why was brother Guy N. Woods, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, not invited? Why were there no men present characterized by the combination of unquestionable scholarship and uncompromising temperament of brother H. Leo Boles, who brought a similar effort involving the "Disciples of Christ" denomination to a rapid climax with his speech in Indianapolis, May 3, 1939? Interestingly, copies of brother Boles' speech in tract form were made available at the "Summit," but brother Cloyd openly repudiated the speech and has since admitted removing the tracts because they were "not appreciated" and contained "abusive and crude" language. It is also interesting to note that a packet containing four compromising documents on fellowship, three of which were written by Carl Ketcherside, was supplied for each participant by one of the Christian Church men. These were *not* removed by brother Cloyd. Why not?

Third, I am concerned because of recommendations that were made to all of the men present at the close of the "Summit" The participants were urged to go home and make contact with men "on the opposite side of the keyboard" to the end that combined worship periods might be arranged. The encouragement was given to exchange pulpits, articles in periodicals and speakers on lectureships. If such is done with no real admission of sinfulness in the use of the instrument (the primary issue of division), and they continue using it (perhaps except when some of us are present), what has really been accomplished? What is the difference between this and the old-fashioned "union revivals" that were once held by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Disciples, except the fact that several years ago no church of Christ would have any part in them? It all appears to be an "agreement to disagree" and a "contrived union where there is no unity," and I see no advantage to it.

As eager and well intentioned as we may grant such efforts to be, I do not see them leading to a real unity based on submission to the authoritative gospel. On the other hand, such efforts have a tendency to become overwhelmed with more emotion than reason and can easily lead to compromise and to the abandonment of biblical authority for the sake of a state of "peace." Real unity or peace can come only if (1) we capitulate and begin using the instrument with them (or at least allow that it is no longer a sin or a fellowship barrier, in which case we may as well use it!), or if (2) they admit that the instrument is sinful and unauthorized and give it up, not merely for the sake of unity but in order to worship God acceptably. In either case there could be *actual unity* (assuming there are no other doctrinal differences remaining), but *only the latter case* could be harmonized with scripture. My fear is that the recommendations coming from the "Summit" will be much more likely to produce the former type of unity, when the thinking of several of the participants is carefully weighed.

In the fourth place, I am concerned about an exceedingly dangerous suggestion that came from brother Wayne Kilpatrick in a discussion group. The following exchange occurred between brethren Kearley and Kilpatrick:

Kearley: "The aspect of the isolation is lack of knowledge of our history. If we could start in our congregations doing some more studies in Restoration history outside of our own branch and look at the distinctions between the conservative instrumentalists and the Christian Church..." [sentence unfinished].

Kilpatrick: "I wonder, too, if bringing Christian Church preachers in for a class like this might be good. Let them come in and tell their history in a class situation. I think **you could ease from the class to the pulpit**" (emphasis added).

Kearley: "Right! And you could get by with telling history."

Kilpatrick: "Yeah."

Kearley: "whereas if they were telling doctrine **heh. heh. heh.**"

Kilpatrick: "And while they are telling history, they could tell enough doctrine to let us know that, hey, we believe alike—so much of it. So that may be a beginning point: in the classroom."

I gravely fear that just such a procedure would be allowed, if not welcomed in many congregations and with no exposure of any erroneous doctrine presented. (Have not many congregations already invited sectarian preachers such as James Dobson and Charles Swindol into their classrooms and/or pulpits?) Such a plan has a deadly potential for subverting the faith.

My fifth concern is the attitude expressed by some of our men who participated. Not only do I reject the accusations of brethren Hawley and Lemmons that the Lord's church is "sectarian," I cannot see how such a denigrating attitude toward the church can help those who are enmeshed in an erroneous practice see the need for coming out of it to be one with us! What gain is there in leaving one "sect" to be united with another?

I was sadly disappointed in brother Cloyd's stance before, during and since the "Summit." His remarks concerning brother Boles' tract and his removal of same at Joplin indicate his attitude toward a "good, sound gospel preacher" of a previous generation. When brother Cloyd apologized for brother Boles' tract at the Joplin meeting, he said it was perhaps "reprinted by someone who does not understand that distinction between the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ." After his apology he asked, "How did I do?" My reply is that he did badly!

Brother Garland Elkins was chiefly responsible for the reprinting of brother Boles' sermon in tract form, with the encouragement of brother Guy N. Woods. Does brother Cloyd imagine that these scholarly men do not "understand that distinction" between the Disciples and the Independents? However, if brother Cloyd was intending to indicate his attitude toward the principal issue that distinguishes the Lord's church from the Independent Christian Church in his apology, perhaps he did well! He prefaced his apology by saying that the tract under discussion was "quite old," but he did not know how old. The inference I gathered was that the matters addressed, and the principles taught therein have now been outgrown. I suggest that brother Cloyd would do well to become more familiar with brother Boles' great sermon. If he had only read the tract more carefully, he would have known that the sermon was delivered on May 3, 1939, at Indianapolis in a "unity meeting" similar to the "Summit" (p. 33). In case brother Cloyd has already burned all of those tracts he recalled at the Joplin meeting, he can read it in installments in the *Gospel Advocate*, beginning with the issue of October 4, 1984. The tract is also available from Getwell Church of Christ, 1511 Getwell Rd., Memphis, TN 38111 and is entitled, *The Way of Unity Between "Christian Church" and Churches of Christ*. Every member of the church would do well to read it in this age of compromise and tolerance.

In his introduction of Reuel Lemmons, I was disappointed in brother Cloyd. He praised him and his work as follows:

For 29 years he edited the *Firm Foundation*, a paper that was read by people in many fellowships, by people on both sides of the keyboard. It served as a very constructive bridge. It was a clearing house for thinking and we miss it ("amens" audible in background). Reuel is an independent thinker. He parrots nobody's party line. That's the kind of iconoclastic sort of

individual we wanted to come and sort of challenge our thinking in this iconoclastic sort of meeting.

Perhaps this statement from brother Cloyd is more revealing than he had intended about his own doctrinal convictions. In his closing remarks at the "Summit," brother Cloyd made the following disparaging remarks:

We need as quickly as possible...to go back to 100 localities across the United States and set up similar local "Summit" meetings. That one scares me. I've got to tell you, that one scares me. The local one scares me because every "knucklehead" in the country is going to get in on these. They won't be nearly as cordial as this has been.

He is right about one thing: if these local meetings develop — there will indeed be some of us "knuckleheads" present (if we know about the meetings) to raise some questions and sharpen some issues relating to fellowship, doctrine, worship, and the principle of scriptural authority! Perhaps brother Cloyd revealed more than he actually intended about his own attitudes by his "knucklehead" statement. Since brother Guy N. Woods has written a superb editorial in the *Gospel Advocate*, expressing serious misgivings about the "Summit," I presume that he would qualify as one of the "knuckleheads."

Since the "Summit," brother Guy N. Woods wrote brother Cloyd (September 5), inquiring if he (Cloyd) did in fact remove brother Boles' tract from the meeting at Joplin and burn or otherwise destroy the copies of same. Brother Cloyd's reply was:

I *did* in fact remove the tracts in question. They were uninvited materials which were not appreciated. Brother Boles' language is abusive and crude. I did not feel that these tracts would be in the best interest of the meeting.

Brother Woods quoted the statement just given in the *Gospel Advocate* editorial of October 4, 1984. However, I have before me the remainder of brother Cloyd's response in that same letter (September 6):

Those who ignorantly distribute such tracts apparently are not aware that the Christian Church has in fact done 2 of the 3 things Boles called for. To continue to call for what has been done already is redundant at best. Please see enclosure.

Whoever distributed (and sent for distribution) said tracts at Joplin was not only a "knucklehead" but "ignorant" besides! (Brother Garland Elkins sent 100 tracts by brother Paul Crockett who delivered them to Hardeman Nichols who set them out at the "Summit.") I wish brother Cloyd had been more specific about the "2 of the 3 things" that the Christian Church has "already done." Why (and how) has this been kept such a secret? I strongly urge brother Cloyd, if indeed he has such evidence, to publish this material far and wide that we may rejoice.

Surely, this would be grand and glorious news to all lovers of truth! But, in fact, the Independents have only repudiated one thing Boles called for (the denominational status of the Disciples) while still retaining the other two (mission associations and the instrument) and have added other errors besides. (Brother Woods has indicated in a phone conversation that brother Cloyd's enclosure was a mimeographed manuscript by brother Kearley, which quotes favorably from brother Boles' tract! Brother Woods said that it contained nothing to show that the Independent Christian Church has made any move toward the Truth on matters that divide us.)

*Sixth, I am concerned about how **some** of the Joplin participants have talked and written since they returned home.* Randy Mayeux of Long Beach, California, wrote: "But we each learned of the integrity, the sincerity, the true but honest difference of opinion." It seems that for some of our men at the "Summit" it is already just that, a "difference of opinion." Brother Calvin Warpula of Houston, Texas, spoke to the Houston preachers' meeting on September 18, 1984, concerning the "Summit." Among the statements at Joplin that really impressed him were: "The Reformers asked, in *whom* do you believe, not *what* you believe!" and "we are generally more committed to the Bible than to Christ and the two are not the same" (Hawley speech). He also said:

I think there are still some of our people who would say. "If you use the instrument you will go to hell." *I used to be there* [emphasis added]. I don't think that's where most of the church is today [so what? DM]. We've got to be careful about taking baptized believers and then sending them to hell over something like this where God doesn't say.

Even more plain spoken was brother Bill Minick in *Good News*, the bulletin "published for The Family at Woodland West," Arlington, Texas, on August 19, 1984:

Our meeting in Joplin was a very profitable one.... When we admit to ourselves and others that we have been too unbending on our traditions and opinions there is hope that we may work with ALL segments of the brotherhood, and not with just one. What we all have in common is our oneness with Jesus Christ because of our new birth. If Jesus can save us, surely we can accept one another. Do we really believe that one will be lost eternally because he does not agree with us on divorce, Sunday School, communion cups, going to war, instrumental music, missionary associations, covenants, formula for baptism, ladies wearing pants in the assembly, etc., etc.? We need to take a good hard look at what is essential to salvation.

I had not heard of any such compromising position from brother Minick before. Let's analyze his statement. He seems to be calling all of the things he lists matters of "our traditions and opinions." This is nothing short of a capitulation of the distinctive pattern for the church in worship and organization at the very least! If matters of worship and organization are negotiable (as mere opinions and traditions should be), then what about terms of membership (the new birth itself)? And what about morals (divorce)? What right does he have to judge those

as saved who have refused to submit to the authority of scripture? Did not the Lord say the opposite in Matthew 7:21-23? Did you ever see such a list of “apples and oranges” as our brother has put together? The very idea of one’s equating instrumental music and missionary associations with communion cups and Bible classes! Throwing instruments and missionary associations into the list was a subtle, but obvious attempt to place them in the same category as matters that are mere expedients. I’ll agree with the last sentence quoted: brother Minick has shown that he, especially, needs to restudy the essentials to salvation.

My seventh concern is the consequence of the meeting. As well-meaning as the planners and participants may be, and as much as we grant their sincere desire for unity, I see some fearful consequences. If most, or even many, of the Joplin participants returned home with a message like that of brethren Warpula and Minick, I do not see unity on the horizon. At least, if a “unity” results it will be one based on compromise rather than on truth. In fact, the song these brethren are singing has the direst notes of dissonance and discord, yea division. There are many of us who *will not* yield the ground on the instrument or societies, any more than the faithful pioneers before us did.

We can no more have fellowship with those who want to remain *in* the Lord’s church and hold matters of obligation to be matters of mere option than we can with those *outside* the Lord’s church who hold such. Will the Joplin “Summit” be the impetus needed to get many unstable, wavering elders, preachers and professors to finally “come out of the closet” and declare their true convictions in such matters? Will this “Summit” be the springboard needed for many brethren to seek peace at any price in this age of tolerance and permissiveness? Will, in fact, the Joplin meeting prove to be the catalyst in a repeat of the division that was taking place a full century ago over the same issues? While not at all wanting to encourage such a development of division, and while earnestly hoping that it will not occur, I greatly fear that the Joplin “Summit” and its successors has all of the ingredients for just such a dire consequence.

Conclusion

There has been a growing chasm, in our beloved brotherhood over the past 20 years between those who have adopted a pragmatic and non-authoritarian approach to their doctrine and practice and those who are “set for the defense of the gospel” (Phi. 1:16, ASV). Ironically, many who were bold defenders of the faith 20 years ago (and less) have become equally bold in their repudiation of those who are still thus minded. A number of astute observers have seen the ominous clouds of heartbreaking division on the horizon for some time as more and more of

our brethren have drifted ever further from the Way. It seems not to be a matter of “if,” but “when.” While lauding any Scripture-based move toward unity, I greatly fear that this latest move is largely in the wrong hands and that the cause we love will ultimately suffer rather than profit from it. If division must come (and sometimes it must—1 Cor. 11:19), regardless of what others may do those who stand for the truth will continue on with the Lord’s work. The Lord’s faithful remnant found itself “starting all over again” almost a century ago, and before many years had transpired, they prospered far beyond the compromising element that left the truth. I am confident that we can do it again if we have to.

[Note: I wrote this MS by request for and it was published in the October 1984 edition of *The Restorer*, ed. Gary Workman. It was also published in the February 1985 edition of *Contending for the Faith*, ed. Ira Y. Rice. It was also published in the April 1985 edition of *Spiritual Sword*, ed. Thomas B. Warren. Further, I also delivered this material orally in the Spiritual Sword Lectures, *The Book of Romans*, hosted by the Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, TN, October 21–25, 1985, directed by Garland Elkins. The MS was not included in the book of the lectures because, in addition to my assigned lecture, I was asked to deliver it in place of Andrew Connally who unable to deliver his lecture because of illness.]

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