



THE PASTOR'S PEN

Volume 434, No. 05

March 04, 2014

A People of the Cup, a People of the Book

If I were to ask you what makes the Disciples of Christ so unique in all of Christendom, what would you say? Another way for us to look at this question is to ask someone who is not a Disciple what they think it is that makes us unique and separates us from other Christian sects and faith traditions. As Disciples of Christ, and a part of the Restoration Movement, we have a long and distinguished heritage of being known for two important things. The first, is for being a people of the Cup. The second, is for being a people of The Book.

When others talk about us being a people of the Cup, they are of course referring to our emphasis on weekly communion and how we see the sacramental value, along with the person need, to gather weekly around the Lord's Table. For those who are a part of the Restoration Movement, we see communion as not only as an act of worship, but also as a source of grace and forgiveness in our constant struggles against sin and Satan. Being a people of the Cup is still an important part of our faith and practice even today and it continues to characterize us and our beliefs.

The second thing that has marked our Movement in the eyes of outside observers is our devotion to and our knowledge of The Book: The Bible. At one point in time the average member of the Christian Church could be just as comfortable discussing systematic theology, Christology, soteriology, epistemology, ecclesiology, patristics, hermeneutics, or any one of a half-dozen other theological topics as they would be talking about the weather, politics or local events. Today however, many of our ministers and elders would be hard put to even define what these words mean, much less discuss them in any depth.

So what happened? Why have we kept our emphasis and practice of weekly communion, but seeming have lost some of our focus on a practical knowledge of the scriptures? Time and the competition for our time may be the big factors in the answer to this question, but that is not all there is to the matter.

If it were merely a matter of time, then we would only need to choose to focus more of our time on the Scriptures and less on the other matters that come up in life. The fact is that we will spend our free time as we chose. Jesus summarized this fact when He said that where your heart is, that is where your treasures are also. Why then, do we not spend more time with the Bible? It is because we no longer treasure it as our forefathers have treasured it? Perhaps the present conditions of our hearts may have a lot more to do with the situation than we would like to admit.

No matter the reason, the bottom line result is that, as a whole, the average member of the Restoration Movement has become less knowledgeable of the Scriptures and more open to

common errors and misunderstandings about what the Bible has to teach us in today's society. We are losing, and many cases have already lost, our reputation for personal Biblical scholarship. Because of that, the world no longer sees us as different from anyone of a hundred other Christian sects or denominations. By our own choice not to study and not to lead in personal scholarship, we have become just another common, protestant body (which by the way, we are not) diluted in the mix of congregations that call themselves Christians. That in turn leads to a loss of denominational loyalty, loss of members who go other places for the traditions and trappings of faith that are more to their liking and fit in more with their lifestyles rather than making their lifestyles and their likes fit in with actual biblical teachings.

The ultimate result of moving away from The Book is that we lose our moral compass and our direction for life. Without studying and referring to our personal guidebook from God, we get lost and once lost, it becomes much harder to find our way back.

So how do we change this trend? How do we find our way back to being known as a "people of The Book" once more? We do it by choosing to spend our time with God's Word. We do it by reading The Holy Scriptures. We do it by studying The Book. We do it by learning what The Word has to say to us about how we should act and live in today's society and then by acting and by living in the way that it tells us to act and live. That is how! To do that though, requires us to change our hearts and our desires, to bring them back into line with God's will. That is not an easy task, but it is a necessary one.

In this Lenten Season we have the perfect opportunity to begin regaining our reputation for being a "people of The Book." Are you ready to do your part to help accomplish this task? It is a worthy goal and great undertaking for any Christian to become known for their Biblical knowledge and understanding. You can do it, but first, you have to want to do it. Then you have to make it a priority for your life. Are you willing to do that? If so, then rededicate yourself to the study and the pursuit of becoming a one of the People of the Book.

With an open Bible before me, looking for you to join in study,

James

