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A Reason for Our Existence.

It is a fact that we, as a religious body of people, not only have an organized existence, but that we also stand out in bold contrast to the religious denominations by which we are surrounded. But in what respect do we differ from other organized bodies? What are our aims and purposes as a people, and how is our work to be distinguished from that of our neighbors? These are legitimate questions, and questions that shall engage our attention for the time being. We think it can be safely assumed that if we are simply a denomination among the rest, our aims are no higher than theirs and our work of substantially the same nature, then no good reason can be assigned for our existence, for it is quite evident that there are already too many denominations. It is further evident for the same reason that as long as a body of people can, with all due freedom, worship God conscientiously, and according to the Scriptures within the bosom of another body, it is not necessary for them to go out, and it would, possibly, be wrong for them to do so under such circumstances. Now it is a fact about which there is but little controversy, that every man should be left perfectly free to search the Scriptures for himself, and to follow, to the best of his ability, what he conscientiously believes the word of God to enjoin upon him. To think or to act otherwise, is to contradict the fundamental principle of all true liberty and to undermine the very foundation on which Christianity is established. That the Scriptures enjoin it upon every man to do what he knows to be right in the sight of God, whatever may be the opinions of others, there can be no question. If we are not at perfect liberty, under all circumstances, to obey what God commands, then we are at liberty to do nothing. Now it is an evident fact that we, as an organized body of believers, with our knowledge of the Bible and our present aims, purposes and practices to be carried into effect, could not worship God acceptably within the borders of any religious organization on earth without being

either disturbed ourselves or disturbing some one else. Then applying these principles to the question in hand, there was left but one of two things for the people who wished to be known simply as Christians, or Disciples of Christ to do, namely, either to be cast out from among the people with whom they were first identified, or to go out voluntarily and organize themselves for aggressive work, and thus exercise their Christian rights in worshipping God in *all things* according to the Scriptures. Seeing that these things are true, who can justly ostracize us for our present attitude to Christendom and the world? If we are now engaged in a work of restoration peculiar to ourselves, who is to blame for it? If we maintain a separate existence and present a bold front to the denominations by which we are surrounded, whose business is it? We are willing now, and have so proclaimed from the first day of our separate existence, to unite with them upon the only possible and true basis of Christian union to be found under the broad heavens, but *they will not*. Hence we are compelled, like the apostles of old, to shake off the dust of our feet for a testimony against them, and try to follow the commandments of God rather than the traditions of men. If this course is not satisfactory, then we have no hope of ever being able to satisfy them.

In the days of the apostles there were no denominations after the modern type. This fact no sane man will think of calling in question. There was the church of God and the churches of Christ, and so far as pure Christianity was concerned, these contained the whole of it. It was also true that there were no creeds then such as we now have. The primitive churches received the simple unadulterated word of God as it was handed down to them by inspired men, and this alone constituted their rule of faith and practice in all things pertaining to life and godliness. But it was not long till the leaven of iniquity began to work. The man of sin took his seat in the temple of God; superstition and the traditions of men occupied high places in the worship, the churches began falling away from the steadfastness and simplicity of their faith, the Bible was soon wrested from the people and placed into the hands of the priests, then Rome proclaimed herself master of the situation

while the people were shrouded in spiritual darkness and left without God and without hope in the world. But God did not forget the people. Hence in due time Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others were raised up to do a great work, and it was not long till the smoke of battle ascended before God and the clash of arms was heard on all sides. The result of all this spiritual fight was the grand Reformation of the sixteenth century, the story of which is too familiar to our readers to need repetition in these columns. Thus was given a foundation on which to commence building. The work of Luther and his coadjutors was therefore a work of necessity. But because the work of Luther was indispensable to the progress of Christianity is no reason why we should be satisfied to stop where he did. That should be rather our starting point, for while the work of Luther in the main was all right, it did not go far enough. John Wesley soon came along and took up the work of reformation, but like those of his predecessors, it was a reformation of erroneous doctrines and practices then in existence rather than a tearing down of the human forms of church government and a building up from the very foundation of primitive Christianity. But these men could not accomplish the whole work. Something must be left to others. So in the providence of God and in the course of time, the Campbells made their appearance on the American continent. But when they came to survey the field with the Bible, the only infallible rule, in hand, they soon saw that all Christendom was more or less still in the mists of Babylon and under the spiritual bondage of Rome. Now the question arose as to what was best to be done under these circumstances. With the New Testament before them their minds very naturally ran back to the days of the apostles and to the churches that were established under their preaching. It was an easy matter to be seen that these churches which continued steadfastly in the simplicity of the faith were worshipping God in all things acceptably. It was also plain that if the churches of the nineteenth century should worship God after the *same manner*, they would equally meet his approval. Hence, from that day to the present, the people known as Disciples of Christ have been faithfully laboring to this end. Their work then is preëminently a work

of *restoration* rather than of reformation. They propose to take the word of God, and this *alone*, as their guide; and as sufficiently to thoroughly furnish them unto *all good works*. They propose to go back of all ecclesiasticisms, denominationalisms, creeds, and party names, and plant themselves among the primitive churches and adopt their faith in its purity and their approved practices without change. In other words, they propose to hold the same creed that they held, to wear the names that they wore, to believe the same proposition and doctrine that they believed, to make the same good confession that they made, to practice the same baptism that they practiced, and in short to do whatever they did in order to become Christians and then follow them as clearly as possible in all points of Christian duty and forms of church polity. This in brief constitute our aims and purposes as a religious people. This we regard as a work of necessity laid upon us, and we are fully determined that nothing shall deter us from this high and holy work of restoring to the world Apostolic Christianity in all its fullness.

What Shall be Our Name?

At the General Christian Missionary Convention recently held in Lexington, Ky., it was moved by one of its members that the phrase "Church of Christ" be "adopted" as the name by which our church organization shall be known throughout the world. This motion was ruled out of order because unconstitutional, and hence was not submitted to the vote of the Convention. This is not the first time this matter has been mentioned; for there are those among us who have heretofore contended that we should adopt some *one* descriptive name in order that we may stand out in a more prominent light before the people, or that we may be known and read of all men. With all due respect for those good brethren who differ with us, we beg leave to submit a few objections to this whole movement.

1. To use the phrase "Church of Christ" to simply describe us as an organized body of religious people is to restrict its use to a meaning to be found nowhere in the word of God. It is admitted by these brethren that there are Christians or members of the church of Christ to be found outside of our church organization. Hence upon this