

“Dedicated to the Restoration of New Testament Christianity”

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The *Good News from Getwell* has the reminder perpetually printed on the back of each copy that the Lord’s church is “dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity.” A recent reminder of why this is necessary came to light on two broadcasts of the Nancy Grace program on CNN. One highlighted prejudicial statements from a Baptist preacher, Tom Rakula; the other a false statement that has been heaved from the mouth of Rubel Shelly for more than two decades now. Brief attention will be given to both.

The Baptist Preacher

Why an interviewer would select a Baptist preacher to find out what “the church of Christ believes” was obviously done in the interest of generating controversy. The logical choice would be to select a well known preacher from the churches of Christ like James Watkins, Mack Lyon, or Winford Claiborne who each appear weekly on television and radio programs that are broadcasted throughout the entire nation and 24/7 on the Gospel Broadcasting Network. Keep watching Nancy Grace and see if she ever hosts a program on disorders of the brain and invites a local podiatrist to answer questions! The false, ignorant, and prejudicial statements of the Baptist preacher began with his comment that the church of Christ is a young church beginning just 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell. Such an idea represents neither the New Testament nor the man to whom it is erroneously ascribed. Note that during his personal ministry Jesus Christ promised to build his church (Mt. 16:18). Now, one of two things is true: either he did not build his church and serious problems of credibility and expectation result, or he did build his church, and it clearly may be identified as his church. Students of the New Testament rightly point to the specific chapter of the New Testament, Acts 2, as the location where the church Christ promised to build began, in fact, the day it began 3,000 souls

were added to it as the authorized historian Luke recorded (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). In AD 62, the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16).

Alexander Campbell had no interest in starting a man-made church; he spent the crowning years of his life teaching others how to extricate themselves from the doctrines of men which Jesus said were “vain” and ultimately will be “rooted up” by the Lord himself (Mt. 15:9, 13). He knew the tumultuous process of breaking with the ever popular doctrines men because he himself had done just that. The church of Christ was brought into existence seventeen centuries before Alexander Campbell was born. Those like the Baptist preacher on Nancy Grace’s program by making such statements are ignorant of either what the New Testament teaches on the subject or what Alexander Campbell taught on the subject or quite possibly both!

Another errant statement the Baptist preacher made was that salvation is by faith alone. He faulted the churches of Christ for not going along with the majority of religious denominations in this false teaching. Why should it be thought strange for people of faith to respect what the Lord Jesus Christ himself said about belief and baptism? Mark recorded the utterance of Christ on the subject, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). It matters not to the faithful whether or not the teaching is popular, for God does not take into consideration what is popular with man (Isa. 40:15; Mt. 7:13-14).

The Baptist preacher reached the limit when he suggested that the church of Christ is a “borderline cult.” Does he consider the founder of the church of Christ to be a cult leader? If so, you see what he thinks of Christ and arrive at an additional reason why he should never have been selected to represent with credulity what

churches of Christ believe. Nancy Grace had chided a guest on a previous program for suggesting that the church of Christ was a cult, so this Baptist preacher knew the limits to which his host would allow him range. Those who make this baseless accusation express colossal ignorance of what a cult is because a leading characteristic of a cult is having a charismatic leader. In the United States an estimated 13,000 independent and autonomous congregations of churches of Christ cooperate with a singular mission of evangelizing the world for Christ by preaching the word without even a central earthly headquarters much less a "charismatic leader."

Then, it would be hilarious if not so serious, that the Baptist preacher after his empty-headed blasting away at churches of Christ added "and they are ungracious"! It requires a great deal of imagination to speculate that this particular Baptist preacher knows anything about that which is involved in being "gracious."

The Change Agent Leader

Rubel Shelly has been guilty for more than two decades of advancing the view that "there are devout, sincere, knowledgeable Christians in all the denominations." Incidentally his co-author of *I Just Want to be a Christian*, Randy Harris, where this position was initially articulated, has been summoned to Memphis April 6, 2006, by Dean Evertt Huffard of the Harding University Graduate School of Religion to advance this error right in our own back yard! Discussions of the statement are at this point twenty years later legion which point out that a Christian possibly may be devout and sincere in a denomination but not knowledgeable of God's will concerning the fatal error of denominational division as discussed in the prayer of Jesus for his disciples (Jn. 17:20-23) or the writings of the apostles (I Cor. 1:10). Clearly, if he were knowledgeable he would not long remain a practitioner of that fatal error.

Again, Shelly made the statement, "We are Christians only, but not the only Christians." In view of Acts 2:47 and Ephesians 4:4 and 5:25, which has all the saved added to the one body, the church, Shelly and all his denominational

friends are left with the inexplicable conviction that there are Christians somewhere other than in Christ and in his church (Rom. 12:5; Gal. 3:27).