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Declaration Prevents Church Division

BY DAVID G. ROEBUCK

Warm handshakes and hugs, cheerful good-byes and perhaps even sighs of relief could be seen and heard as delegates made their way out of the Municipal Auditorium in Birmingham, Alabama, following the forty-second General Assembly. Fears of another tumultuous Bishops' Council had gone unrealized. Rather than acrimony, the delegates had harmoniously adopted a new statement of church doctrine—a Declaration of Faith. Instead of deep division, the year 1948 saw unity in the faith for the Church of God.

The fact that the Church of God did not have a statement such as the Declaration of Faith until 1948 does not mean that there was little concern for biblical doctrine. Rather, the lack of such a statement was a product of the church's heritage.

Spurling and Creeds

Christian Union founder R. G. Spurling passionately opposed creeds of any kind. He believed that the adoption of a creed at the Council of Nicaea led to the church's apostasy in the fourth century. According to Spurling's understanding, no creed has ever been or can ever be infallible because creeds are human interpretations of the Scriptures. Thus, no creed should be used to divide Christians from one another. Rather, Christians full of the love of God should struggle together to find the true understanding of Scripture and continue to fellowship in love despite their differences. Spurling himself knew the pain that could come

from battles about doctrine as he had experienced the divisive nature of Landmarkism that had swept through Baptist churches in east Tennessee.

For Spurling, creeds were unnecessary because "the New Testament is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. . . [and] contains all things necessary for salvation and church government." He continued, "We invite to union and fellowship all persons who avow faith in Christ and love to God and His people and a willingness to live a Christian life so as not to dishonor the cause of Christ, and we exclude only for known violations of God's Word or commands."¹

Spurling's opposition to creeds did not produce a church libertine in faith and practice. The Assembly frequently discussed and clarified points of theology, the Publishing House printed numerous tracts and pamphlets, and the *Evangel* regularly included articles about biblical doctrine.

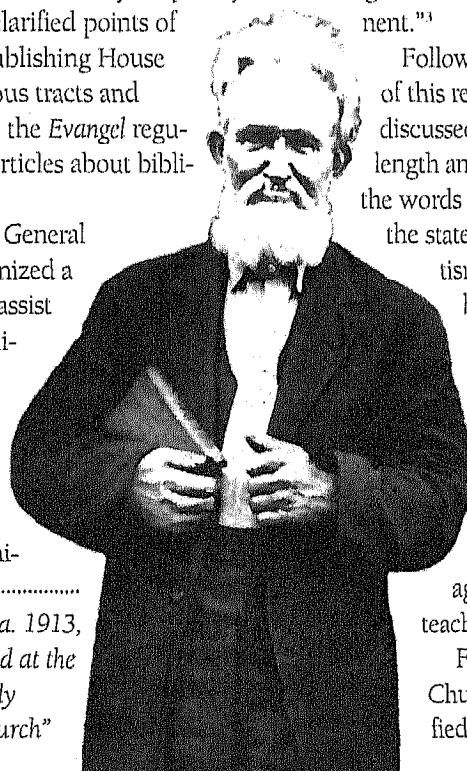
By 1909 the General Assembly recognized a need to further assist ministerial candidates in understanding the Scriptures. They appointed a committee to prepare exami-

.....
R. G. Spurling, ca. 1913,
when he preached at the
General Assembly
about "God's Church"

nation questions and biblical references.² The next year, this committee's work appeared in the *Evangel* under the title "The Church of God." Noting that the Church of God stands for "the whole Bible rightly divided" with the "New Testament as the only rule for government and discipline," the committee listed twenty-five brief statements with scriptural references. These statements included twenty-one doctrinal issues such as repentance and justification along with four practical life-style issues such as "total abstinence from all liquor or strong drinks." These statements were not intended to serve as a creed or as an exhaustive list of doctrines but were simply identified as "some of the teaching that is being made prominent."³

Following the publication of this report, the Assembly discussed these statements at length and decided to drop the words "by immersion" from the statement on water baptism. This was not done because the Assembly supported any other mode of baptism, but because the word "immersion" is not specifically in the Bible. The Assembly then agreed to have these teachings reprinted.⁴

From time to time the Church of God has modified "The Teachings" as



important matters emerge in its life and practice. The Assembly made the most comprehensive change in 1988, when it replaced the growing list of "Practical Commitments" with declarations on spiritual example, moral purity, personal integrity, family responsibility, behavioral temperance, modest appearance and social obligation.⁵

Diversity and Controversy

This anti-creedal approach to faith that characterized the heartbeat of the early Church of God also allowed for the development of diversity on some theological issues. Nowhere has this diversity been more controversial than that regarding the doctrine of sanctification. Indeed, diversity regarding sanctification led directly to the adoption of the Declaration of Faith fifty years ago.

This pattern of theological development is not unique in the history of the Christian church. For example, diversity and controversy over Arius' understanding of Jesus led to the development of the creed Spurling so deeply lamented. This oft-repeated pattern of controversy followed by the development of a theological statement to resolve the controversy was seen earlier this century in our sister fellowship, the Assemblies of God. Division over the baptismal formula and the Trinity spurred the General Council of the Assemblies of God to adopt a Statement of Fundamental Truths in 1916.⁶

From the 1896 Shearer Schoolhouse revival, the Church of God was clearly committed to the doctrine of "entire" sanctification as taught by the Holiness movement in the United States.⁷ Along with the vast majority of Pentecostals, the church taught that the roots of sin remained after justification; therefore, a subsequent, definite work of grace was necessary to cleanse the believer of those roots. Although the Church of God did not yet subscribe to a creed, the brief fifth Teaching espoused "Sanctification



Dr. James L. Slay was chairman of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Faith in 1948.

.....
subsequent to Justification."

An independent Chicago pastor, William H. Durham (1873-1912), challenged this view and changed the beliefs of the majority of Pentecostals regarding sanctification. Following his Pentecostal experience at Azusa Street in 1907, Durham taught that it was illogical to believe that sin remained in the believer after justification. According to Durham, "when God saves a man, he makes him clean."⁸ Following salvation, the work of Christ at Calvary should be appropriated over the lifetime of the believer, and there is no need for an additional definite work of grace. Durham's "Finished Work of Calvary" view of sanctification soon dominated much of Pentecostalism, especially the Assemblies of God, which organized shortly after Durham's death.

Despite early opposition to the "Finished Work" doctrine of sanctification, succeeding decades saw an influx of "Finished Work" proponents into the Church of God. Perhaps the most prominent of these was Finis J. Dake. A popular camp meeting and Bible Training School teacher, Dake taught a

modified "Finished Work" doctrine and influenced many Church of God ministers and laity. As a result of the teaching of Dake and others, growing diversity through the 1930s and 1940s led to an increasingly rancorous debate over the doctrine of sanctification.

A parallel, although unrelated, development to this growing controversy, was the participation of the Church of God in the National Association of Evangelicals beginning in 1942. The NAE's seven-point Statement of Faith may have influenced some Church of God leaders to see a need for a similar declaration.

By the mid-1940s, controversy surrounding the teaching of D. C. Barnes at Bible Training School and College brought the issue of sanctification to the forefront of Church of God life. In response, the 1944 Assembly directed the Board of Directors to "adopt a Declaration of Faith" and to require all faculty "to sign a contract annually, agreeing to teach nothing contrary thereto, and shall permit no person unable or unwilling to accept the said declaration in good faith to be employed."⁹

When Church of God bishops (ordained ministers) met in Council in 1946, the issue of sanctification dominated what historian Charles W. Conn called "One of the stormiest sessions ever experienced in the Council. . . ." According to Conn, "The church came dangerously close to a break in unity and fellowship when some speakers pushed for a ruling that all ministers must sign a pledge that they would teach the 'second definite' rather than the progressive or continuous view [of sanctification]. Wise heads and sincere

—See DECLARATION, page 5



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The Golden Rails

BY R. G. SPURLING

R. G. SPURLING was a frequent and respected speaker at early General Assemblies. His 1913 address brought together concern about creeds with his understanding of the history and doctrine of the church. Spurling's address was reprinted in the Minutes along with a description of the charts he used for illustration. Here are excerpts of General Overseer A. J. Tomlinson's introduction and Spurling's address. We are also including one of two known sets of preaching charts Spurling used. (See Minutes of the Eighth Annual Assembly, 38-42.)

General Overseer [A. J. Tomlinson] introduced R. G. Spurling by saying:

"I was searching for the truth. I knew there must be some plan yet undiscovered for the government of God's people. It was in God's providence that I met Brother Spurling who explained to me his vision of God's church as he saw it in the Word. He showed me that we were received into the church by covenanting with each other to obey the laws of Christ. In one sense I look upon him as my father.

"The first year I was in this church it went by the name of Holiness Church at Camp Creek. After searching the Scripture we a little later called it the Church of God."

The Address

People make a great mistake by thinking they get into the church when they get into the kingdom. Every soul that enters the kingdom comes by way of the cross.

On the day of Pentecost He laid the foundation of the church and it is still in process of construction.

(Here he pointed to the chart and explained about the city, the gates, the river of life, the tree of life, etc., bring-

ing in the construction of Solomon's temple, to show the minute directions as to the construction of Christ's church on His own law and government without an interference by man's creeds or laws.)

We next want to show the church pure as it came from the hand of God and how it departed from the original power and glory.

(Here he point[ed] to the second chart.)

This beautiful virgin became a harlot. The church from its state of virginity drifted into Roman Catholicism. No church stood on God's law and government during the dark ages.

The seven heads of this great beast are the nations in which Romanism prevailed during the beginning of the dark ages. God's government is God's church. Ezek. 16 will explain this great harlot.

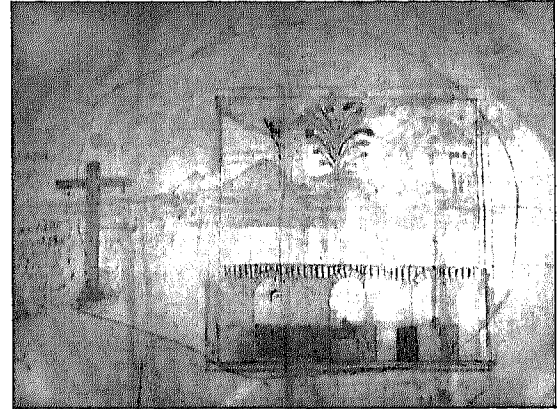
(Here he displayed the third chart.)

From the reformation at different periods of time we find the truth gradually unfolding, and as men caught glimpses of truth they made creeds which these different small railroads represent. But the great engine of the Church of God can not travel these side tracks because they are narrow gauge.

As different creeds were formed and light unfolded, we are now able to catch a glimpse of the two golden rails which have been covered by creeds and men-made laws.

John was the civil engineer who went before and blazed the way and drove the three stakes of repentance, faith and baptism, and said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repen-

tance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." This Jesus of whom John spake said, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."



Spurling's first chart established the origin of the church.

One of these golden rails represents the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" and the other, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self."

Now the great engine is on the track and the people on board when Death steps up and claims the passengers. Then Jesus gave his life to pay the debt



Spurling's second chart portrayed the apostate church.

and buy the right of way from earth to glory.

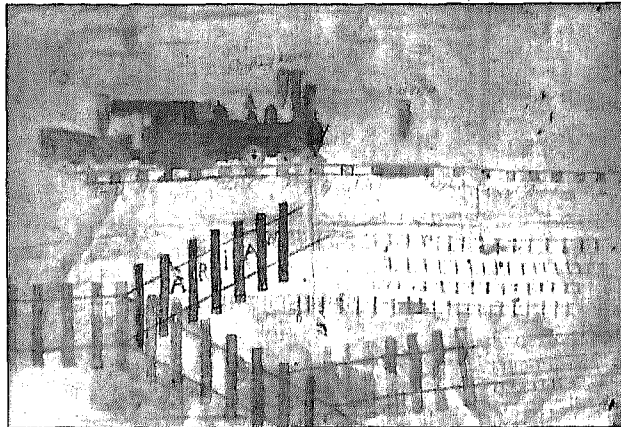
(Pointing to the engine he [said].) There she stands all ready to go but no power until the day of Pentecost when down came the Holy Ghost and three thousand boarded the train and off she goes.

Satan now sees that at that rate he would soon be left with no people so he set about a plan to derail the engine.

About 320 A. D. Alexander and Tiranus, two great leaders, met at Constantinople and formed a creed from which the many different man-made creeds have had their origin.

Here in this division they left the golden rails of the law of love and made their own rails of wood upon which the heavenly train could not run as they were narrow gauge.

There had been so much rubbish piled upon these golden rails through



Spurling's third chart depicted Christianity divided by creeds.

fifteen centuries of time that I have spent many sleepless nights trying to remove the rubbish and uncover these same beautiful golden rails.

The Apostles did not assume the right to form government for the church, so God forbid that I should make a law to govern the people of God. Let us stick to God's government.

Now the church is a people ruled by Jesus and His laws. It is good not to be tied to the shore but have your boat out on the great sea of God's love.

SPURLING from page 8

by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit—by heralding the gospel, by the inspired Word in Scripture—not by creedal statements.

To be sure, doctrine and theological reflection were important to Spurling; but the nature and qualities of love—patience, kindness, forbearance, humility—were necessary ingredients to make doctrine wholesome and palatable, and thus an indispensable ingredient in the makeup of the church, particularly in regard to Christian unity. For even if every article of a creed were true, it could burst asunder Christian fellowship, inasmuch as “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”¹¹ Thus, love in action was “the lost link” to unite God's people. There was no substitute. In order to foster this attitude in the church, Spurling, Tomlinson, and later others often referred to the Church of God as the “church of love.”

For this reason, Spurling saw covenant union as superior to creedal union. Covenants were more alive and flexible, able to be reformed and to grow naturally with the growth of the “saints in light.” They were conducive to growing relationships; whereas creeds were notorious, historically, for being static and fixed, and thus for resisting the work of the Spirit in leading and guiding the church “into all

truth and righteousness.” Thus, Spurling insisted that Christian unity was centered in love and the simple truths of the gospel rather than in static articles of religion formulated by human ingenuity. Not that Spurling objected to formulating statements about doctrine, but he maintained that the church's judicious inquiries and interpretations remained always a working document, subject to being edited and reformed by the infallible Word of God in the holy scriptures. After the General Assembly was instituted in 1906 he considered it to be only a means to an end, not an infallible authority. It was a “judicial body only,” not legislative nor executive. And it was an imperfect body at that. He knew that one million finite people together could not manufacture one atom of infinite truth. Thus, the Holy Scriptures remained always the supreme authority of the church.

Surely, the vision of this great father in the church is worth consideration today.

¹ Wade H. Phillips, “Richard Spurling and the Baptist Roots of the Church of God,” paper presented at the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Guadalajara, Mexico, November 11-13, 1993, 16-30.

² A.J. Tomlinson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, Tenn.: White Wing Publishing House, 1984), 207; and see R.G. Spurling,

The Lost Link (Turtletown, Tenn.: by author, 1920), 42, 45.

³ Though without the advantage of an education in New Testament Greek, Spurling perceived the sense of Jesus' meaning in Matthew 16:18 [KJV], and interpreted “I will build my church” as an on-going process, as something-in-the-making (*The Lost Link*, 18-19), agreeable with the Greek term, *oikodomeso*. A.J. Tomlinson took exception with Spurling's interpretation on this point, but without justification. See also Wade H. Phillips, “A Concise History of the Church of God of Prophecy” (Unpublished paper, Church of God Theological Seminary, 1998), 77-78 notes 216-21.

⁴ *The Lost Link*, 40-42; and cp. Galatians 2:4; 3 John 9-10; Jude 4; et al.

⁵ R.G. Spurling, “The Church,” *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, March 15, 1910, 1, 4.

⁶ *The Lost Link*, 34.

⁷ Spurling anticipated that the “evening light” prophecy in Zechariah 14:7 would be fulfilled in a restorationist movement in the last days. Hence, the name of the official publication in 1910. See *The Lost Link*, 25-28; and Wade H. Phillips, “Our Rich Church of God Heritage—Born of the Spirit,” *Church of God History & Heritage* 1, no. 1 (1997): 1.

⁸ *The Lost Link*, 45.

⁹ *The Lost Link*, 9-10, 14, 22-23, 42-44; and cp. Matthew 22:37-39; John 13:34-35; 15:9-17; 17; Romans 12:9-10; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 8:7-24; Ephesians 4: 5; 6:23-24; 1 John 4:7, 8; et al.

¹⁰ *The Lost Link*, 29; and cp. Colossians 3:14.

¹¹ *The Lost Link*, 9, 25-26; and cp. 2 Corinthians 3:6.

DECLARATION *from page 2*

hearts prevailed, and no such pressure was allowed."¹⁰

Attention especially centered on the *Evangel* editor, teachers at the Bible Training School and College, and books "embracing points of doctrine contrary to the established teachings of the General Assembly."¹¹ Attempting to resolve the debate, the Council appointed a committee to bring back a "Declaration of Faith." Chaired by E. M. Ellis, a strong proponent of sanctification as a second, definite work of grace, the committee brought back an eleven-point declaration. Although this declaration was eventually tabled, the Assembly did agree that the Editor-in-Chief as well as Bible Training School and College personnel should agree to a statement of faith.¹²

Additionally, the ministers affirmed a "Working Agreement" for the next two years.

We recommend that all motions pertaining to the subject of sanctification and the statement of faith be tabled and we promise to give prayerful and diligent study to doctrinal points upon which we do not see eye to eye, and in the meantime pledge to refrain from making any statements publicly or privately that will tend to further agitation, but to preach and practice holiness, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, till we all come in the unity of the faith.¹³

When the Bishops convened again in 1948, two days had been set aside to discuss the "matter of sanctification." But upon the recommendation of Paul H. Walker, the Council agreed that two days were not needed. E. M. Ellis then made a motion that a committee be appointed to draw up articles of faith, paying special attention to those already approved by the Bible Training School Board of Directors.

The appointed committee included

The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel

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at a time when they were not expecting anything unusual, enabled Peter to write thirty-six years later: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent Glory. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came from heaven, we heard when we were with Him in the Holy Mount." 2 Peter 1:16-18. Suppose that they had stayed away from that wonderful service, they would not only have missed the blessing themselves, but could not have been the blessing to the following generations that they have been in convincing the people of the divinity of Jesus Christ. By your staying away from your crowd, or dividing off from your Shepherd, you may miss a blessing yourself that might enable you to become one of the bridehood saints, as well as to fall short of what you might be in your ability to bless others, the very thing you want to do if you are a true child of God. Some saints are going to be taken up soon to meet Jesus in the air, and if I am not one that goes like Elijah I want to be like Elisha, so close to some that do go that I can receive a double portion of their spirit to enable me to endure successfully the awful persecutions, trials and afflictions that will be poured out during the tribulation days. I want to stay with my crowd. I mean to do it, by the help of God. I don't expect to wander about to hear what the new men have to say, neither do I expect myself to be contaminated with diverse and strange doctrines that are being poured forth by these evangelists, evangelists and evangelists, who have no identification with established people of God. May the Lord help every one who reads this to weigh every thought carefully and prayerfully; and not pass it lightly by. "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh," and you find yourself weighed in the balance and found wanting, all because you have not pressed your way to the front and stayed close to the Great Shepherd, your under-shepherd and the most spiritual part of the church.

Good news comes from many parts of the world of the continued falling of the "Latter Rain." This is for the ripening of the grain for the final great harvest.

Be sure and read every article, as you might miss something good if you should not.

The Church of God

Standards for the whole Bible rightly divided. The New Testament as the only rule for government and discipline. Below is given some of the teaching that is made prominent:

TEACHING.

1. Repentance: Mark 1:15, Luke 13:3, Acts 3:19.
2. Justification: Rom. 5:1, Titus 3:7.
3. Regeneration: Titus 3:5.
4. New Birth: John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 3:9.
5. Sanctification subsequent to justification: Rom. 6:2, 1 Cor. 1:30, 1 Thes. 4:8, Heb. 13:12.
6. Holiness: Luke 1:75, 1 Thes. 4:7, Heb. 12:14.
7. Water Baptism by immersion: Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16, John 3:22, 23, Acts 8:38-39.
8. Baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to cleansing: The anointment of power for service: Matt. 28:19, Luke 24:49-53, Acts 1:4-8.
9. The speaking in tongues as the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Ghost: John 15:26, Acts 2:4, Acts 10:44-46, Acts 19:1-7.
10. The full restoration of the gifts to the church: 1 Cor. 12:17-10-28-31, 1 Cor. 14:1.
11. Signs following believers: Mark 16:17-20, Rom. 15:18-19, Heb. 2:4.
12. Fruits of the Spirit: Rom. 8:22, Gal. 5:22-23, Eph. 5:8, Phil. 1:11.
13. Divine healing provided for all in the Atonement: Ps. 103:3, Isa. 53:4-5, Matt. 8:17, Jas. 5:14-16, 1 Pet. 2:24.
14. The Lord's Supper: Luke 22:17-20, 1 Cor. 11:23-26.
15. Washing the saints' feet: John 13:4-17, 1 Tim. 5:9-10.
16. Tithing and giving: Gen. 14:18-20, Gen. 28:20-22, Mal. 3:10, Luke 11:42, 1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor. 9:6-8, Heb. 7:4-9-21.
17. Resurrection where possible: Matt. 8:18, Luke 19:2.
18. Pre-millennial second coming of Jesus.
19. First, to resurrect the dead saints, and to catch away the living saints to meet Him in the air: Matt. 24:27-28, 1 Cor. 15:51-52, 1 Thes. 4:15-17.
20. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years: Zech. 14:4, 1 Thes. 4:14, 2 Thes. 1:7-10, Jude 14:15, Rev. 5:10, Rev. 19:11-21, Rev. 20:4-6.
21. Resurrection: John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Rev. 20:5-6.
22. Eternal life for the righteous: Matt. 25:46, Luke 18:30, John 10:28, Rom. 6:22, 1 John 5:11-12.
23. Eternal punishment for the wicked. No liberation, nor annihilation: Matt. 25:41-46, Mark 9:23, 2 Thes. 3:13-9, Rev. 20:10-15, Rev. 21:8.
24. Total abstinence from all liquor or strong drinks: Prov. 20:1, Prov. 23:29-32, Isa. 58:7, 1 Cor. 5:11, 1 Cor. 6:10, Gal. 5:21.
25. Against the use of tobacco in any form, opium, morphine, etc.: Isa. 56:2, 1 Cor. 10:31-32, 2 Cor. 7:11, Eph. 5:3-8, Jas. 1:12.
26. Meats and drinks: Rom. 14:2-3-17, 1 Cor. 8:3, 1 Tim. 4:1-5.
27. The Sabbath: Hosea 6:1, Rom. 14:5-6, Col. 2:16-17, Rom. 13:1-2.

EXAMINATION QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY—EXPERIENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS.

1. Have you been baptized by immersion?
 2. Have you been baptized with the Holy Ghost?
 3. Have you spoken in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance?
 4. Are you free from the use of tobacco in any form?
 5. Are you free from any connection whatever with lodges or secret orders?
 6. Have you any unpaid debts?
 7. If so, do you see your way out?
 8. What is your age?
 9. How long have you lived a sanctified life?
 10. How long have you lived the Spirit-filled life?
- Examination for Bishops and Deacons should be made very carefully from the rules given in 1 Tim. 3, also 1 Tim. 4:12, and Titus 1:6-9.
- No one need apply for the ministry who is living with a woman as his wife who is divorced, neither if he is divorced if the parties divorced from are either one living.
- Give the names of two devout men who are acquainted with your every day life at home and abroad. 1 Tim. 3:10, 1 Tim. 4:12.
- NOTE.—This above is submitted by the committee chosen by the General Assembly which met in January, 1910. Ministers should preserve this copy of the *Evangel* for future reference.

Turkey Creek, Fla.

Dear Brother:

The Church of God at Pine Grove, Fla., ten miles east of Bowling Green, have built themselves a nice little tabernacle, and agreed it so that it makes one of the most delightful places for worship. It is so clean and cool. They made the boards in the woods, and all turned in and helped. It costs any church or school house, and did not cost much. The dear Lord is there to bless in all the services, and therefore it is good to be there. We just let Him have His way, and He surely fills us. Glory to Him now. It is wonderful. Glory to You for the altar.

TULLY THARP, Pastor.

The Committee Report that became the Church of God Teachings was first published in 1910.

proponents of both views of sanctification. James L. Slay, a respected minister and scholar, chaired the committee. Three days later, the committee brought back the present fourteen-item Declaration of Faith, which was approved by both the Bishops' Council and the General Assembly.¹⁴

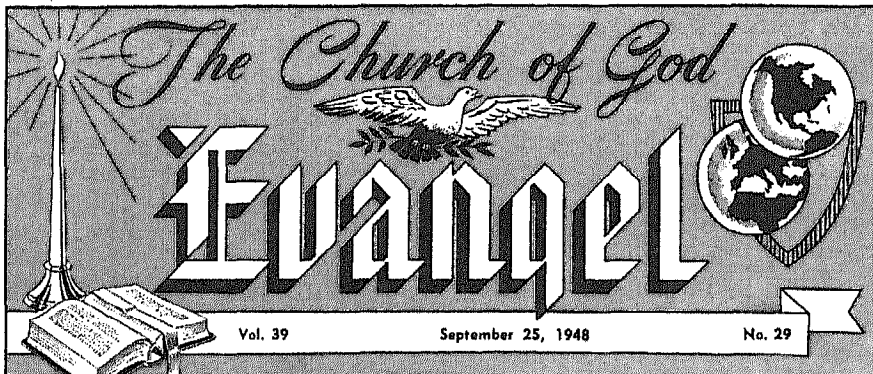
The committee, Bishops' Council and General Assembly considered the approved Declaration of Faith to be temporary, however. All agreed that the Church of God needed a more comprehensive statement and that the

same committee should bring "a full document of the Articles of Faith" to the next Assembly.¹⁵

Following the wishes of the Assembly, the committee met on the new Lee College campus to expand the Declaration of Faith. Once again, controversy over sanctification dominated the discussion. After awhile, the committee admitted it was unable to move forward, and Chairman Slay asked the General Overseer to relieve the committee of its charge.¹⁶ The same controversy that led to the adoption of the

Declaration of Faith succeeded in limiting it to the original fourteen points. Celebrating its fiftieth birthday in 1998, the Declaration of Faith has remained unchanged since its adoption.

- ¹ R. G. Spurling, *The Lost Link* (Turtletown, Tenn.: by author, 1920), 45. See also pp. 22-23.
- ² *General Assembly Minutes, 1906-1914* (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House, 1992), 77.
- ³ "The Church of God," *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*, August 15, 1910, 3.
- ⁴ *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Assembly*, 6-7.
- ⁵ *Minutes of the 62nd General Assembly of the Church of God*, "Journal," 51; see also "Supplement," 15-21.
- ⁶ See Edith L. Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Vol. 1 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 221-39.
- ⁷ For a more complete discussion of the history of the doctrine of sanctification, see David G. Roebuck, "Sanctification and the Church of God," *Reflections . . . Upon Church of God Heritage*, Summer 1992, 1-3, and Fall 1992, 1-3.
- ⁸ Quoted in Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God*, 1: 129.
- ⁹ *Minutes of the 39th Annual Assembly*, 49.
- ¹⁰ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886-1995*, definitive ed. (Cleveland: Pathway Press, 1996), 329-30.
- ¹¹ "Minutes of the Bishops' Council," 1946, 8.
- ¹² "Minutes of the Bishops' Council," 1946, 11.
- ¹³ "Minutes of the Bishops' Council," 1946, 10.
- ¹⁴ "Minutes of the Bishops' Council," 1948, 4 and 27-28. Other members were Glenn C. Pettyjohn, R. P. Johnson, R. C. Muncy, J. A. Cross, J. L. Goins, E. M. Ellis, Paul H. Walker and E. P. Paulk.
- ¹⁵ "Minutes of the Bishops' Council," 1948, 28; and *Minutes of the 42nd General Assembly*, 31-32.
- ¹⁶ "James L. Slay to James M. Beaty," letter dated March 11, 1981; and "James A. Cross to James M. Beaty," letter dated March 7, 1981. Both letters are located in the Dixon Pentecostal Research Center.



Declaration of Faith

(Decisions passed at our recent Assembly)

41. That the following DECLARATION OF FAITH be adopted:

We believe:

1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
2. In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead; that He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.
5. That justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word, and by the Holy Ghost.
7. Holiness to be God's standard of living for His people.
8. In the baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.
9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who re-

pent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

11. Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement.
12. In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.
13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.
14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked.

We recommend that the Editor-in-Chief, the President, Vice-President, and board of directors and faculty members of Lee College and all other Church of God schools sign a contract that they will not teach, publish, or allow to be taught or published anything contrary to this "Declaration of Faith," or any other established doctrine of the Church.

We further recommend that a copy of this "Declaration of Faith" be posted in every classroom and the offices of General Overseer and Editor-in-Chief.

44. That the same Articles of Faith Committee, consisting of James L. Slay, Earl P. Paulk, Glenn C. Pettyjohn, J. L. Goins, J. A. Cross, Paul H. Walker, R. P. Johnson, E. M. Ellis, and R. C. Muncy, prepare a full document of the Articles of Faith for the Church of God, to be presented for acceptance at the next General Assembly of the Church of God.

First publication of the Declaration of Faith in 1948

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What is the Church of God?

BY CHARLES W. CONN

This excerpt is from the March 19, 1956, Evangel. As "The Editor's Message" it reveals much about the faith and practice of the Church of God in the 1950s. Used by permission.

A church must do three basic things to deserve a right to exist: it must follow Christ, be faithful to the Scriptures and benefit humanity. For these reasons only should there be a church known as the Church of God.

First of all, the Church of God is vitally and emphatically *Christian*. No doctrine supercedes the doctrine of Christ, but the church accepts His words as its law and His deeds as its example. He is accepted as sovereign Lord, Savior, Redeemer and King of all the earth. Upon Him and Him alone is the hope of the Church of God founded.

The Church of God is *fundamental* in its doctrine. The five points of fundamentalism are historically and permanently the bedrock of our belief. The first is: (1) the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures. The first point of our Declaration of Faith is that "We believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible." Next, fundamentalism believes in (2) the virgin birth and complete deity of Christ. Our Declaration of Faith says that "Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." Fundamentalism believes in (3) the literal resurrection of the body, and the Church of God declares its faith "in the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked." The fourth point of fundamentalism is (4) the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death for the sins of the world. Our statement is "that justification, regeneration and the new birth are

wrought by faith in the blood of Christ." Finally, fundamentalism asserts faith in (5) Christ's second coming in bodily form to the earth. The Church of God believes "in the premillennial second coming of Jesus."

In every point, our faith is the historic, fundamental Christian faith, not in creed only but also in practice and living hope.

The doctrine of *holiness* is one of the basic precepts upon which the Church of God is founded. The experience of sanctification and the life of holiness in the Wesleyan tradition provided the very impulse that brought the church into being. Our Declaration of Faith states our belief "in sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word and by the Holy Ghost," and, further, "holiness to be God's standard of living for His people."

This historic and scriptural faith in holiness, made possible by the experience of sanctification, is both distinctive and thrilling. The eradication of sin, separation from the world, and the possibility of Christian perfection answers the very longing of the heart of man.

The Church of God is *Pentecostal*, which means that we believe in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. This experience is a separate work of grace for all believers in Christ who will receive it. Just as the believers in Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) received the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit baptism, believers in Christ today can, and should, receive the same experience. While this baptism is not essential to salvation, it endues the believer with power for service and provides added strength and boldness for Christian living. The Church of God believes in

the spiritual gifts enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and divine healing is especially emphasized.

An aggressive *evangelism* is one of the strongest emphases of the Church of God. Revivalism is a chief means of evangelism, but other forms are stressed. From its earliest years, the Church of God has been aware of the Christian responsibility to take the gospel into all the world.

The Church of God is a *charitable* institution. This is particularly true concerning orphans and needy children.

Since 1918, the Church of God has supported schools for the training and teaching of its people. Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee, has Bible college, junior college (liberal arts) and high school divisions. Other schools are operated in other parts of the nation, and most foreign lands have schools, colleges or seminaries.

The Church of God endeavors, in every field of Christian service, to meet the needs of today. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"—with emphasis on *today*. Our Christian belief is in twentieth century living, not in a creed that has become impotent. Our efforts are current, not merely historic and not merely hopeful, even though they are historic, current and hopeful.

What is the Church of God? It is a church under God, anchored by the past, reaching for the future, meeting the crisis of today.



Charles W. Conn, Litt.D., is the official historian of the Church of God and is author of *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God, 1886-1995, definitive edition* (Cleveland, Tenn.: Pathway Press, 1996).

FROM THE ASSOCIATE EDITOR

R.G. Spurling and the Church

Richard G. Spurling's doctrine of the church developed as a reaction against his traditional upbringing in the Landmark movement among nineteenth century Southern Baptists.¹ Against Landmarkists, who maintained a rigid creedal and exclusive system, Spurling sought a basis for Christian fellowship that could, at once, cultivate personal growth in Christian character and foster visible unity among God's people.

His initial reform movement in 1886 was highly idealistic, centered in a rugged individualism. He attempted to allow each person "equal rights and privilege to read and interpret [the Scriptures]."² His excesses in regard to personal conscience and local church independence eventually gave way under the leadership of A. J. Tomlinson to the practice of corporate counsel and the church's developing centralized government. But the tension between personal conscience and the counsel and authority of the church's centralized government was a problem for him throughout his life. Nevertheless, the essential principles of Spurling's doctrine would never change, and these he considered to be the "rock" upon which Christ is *building*³ His church.

The visible nature of the church was a cardinal principle upon which Spurling began his reform movement. This view distinguished the church from the kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the spiritual sphere of all regenerate believers, whereas the church is composed of believers, but also of backsliders, frauds, and "false brethren crept in unawares."⁴ Drawing from his heritage rooted in the "radical reformation" of the sixteenth century, Spurling maintained that there is no

such thing as an "invisible church." The visible nature of the church is formalized by a mutual covenant between believers and Christ, which Spurling called the "Christ wedlock."⁵

According to Spurling's pietistic tradition, the concept of an invisible church was a doctrine invented by Martin Luther in order to justify and identify God's people who were scattered and regrouped in denominations during and after the initial Reformation.

Spurling, on the other hand, believed that denominations were contrary to God's plan and purpose. These "man-made walls" between God's people were the result of the apostasy of the church after the third century, and of the reformers' imperfect reformation begun in the sixteenth century. Accordingly, Spurling believed that Jesus' prayer in John 17 and many apostolic passages relating to the unity of the church were prophetic, awaiting fulfillment by a "more God honoring reformation"⁶ in the last days.⁷ This occasioned the primary impetus for his movement in 1886. He accepted the biblical challenge and, accordingly, launched a movement of conciliation.⁸

It is a matter of great significance that the church modified Spurling's view of individual freedom in its ever-expanding membership and decision-making process, and little by little lost sight of his ecumenical vision focused in divine love (though it was at first zealously embraced). Over against creeds, Spurling saw in love the key to open the door to God's plan for Christian unity, for which he found ample support in the New Testament.⁹ He maintained that love had the miraculous power to transcend creedal formulas and ecclesiastical legislation when the two came into tension.



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Divine love generates brotherly love; and thus, for Spurling, love was God's liberating power and the qualifying principle of Christian fellowship, for love created a disposition of submission in the church which formed "the bond of perfectness."¹⁰ Certainly, a brother or sister was not expendable for the sake of a creed; rather, doctrine was intended to bring members along in Christian growth and maturity. After all, men and women were born again

—See SPURLING, page 4

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