

MY FIVE FINGER EXERCISE

Walter Scott was a great evangelist and he led many to Christ. He was famous for his "five finger exercise" in helping people to become Christians. He would say, "Now beginning with your thumb repeat after me, 'Faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Later on, we adapted it to "faith, repentance, confession of faith, baptism, and living the Christian life." That little demonstration has helped to lead many to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In new church work in New Jersey, I am using my own "five-finger exercise" to help explain who we are and what we believe, especially as I encounter new people who attend our worship service. On the initial visit in their home, they may not be ready for Scott's "five-finger exercise", but they do need to know who we are and what we believe. People need to know what it is that makes Churches of Christ and Christian churches different and unique. There are at least five things we need to emphasize as we begin to acquaint who we are to those who are inquiring.

1. WE ARE UN-DENOMINATIONAL - We are not a group of local congregations governed by a religious hierarchy. We believe that Christ is the Head of His church and each local congregation governs itself under Christ and His Word, the Bible. This has great appeal. There is much unrest in the denominational world because of decisions that are being made by "those in charge" which run contrary to the beliefs of their members, especially on social issues like abortion and homosexuality. Jesus said in John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Being un-denominational preserves our freedom in Jesus Christ. It allows us to chart our own course, using the Divine road map, the Bible. Yes, we are un-denominational.

2. THE BIBLE IS OUR TEXT BOOK - Alexander Campbell said, "The Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice; and this alone can reform the world and save the church." We are a Bible church. I agree with P.H. Welshimer who wrote in his timeless tract, "Facts Concerning the New Testament Church" that "On non essentials we admit the largest liberty; on the essentials we appeal to the New Testament. Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

Our world really wants to know what God is saying. Can we build the Lord's church on the meat of His Word? Yes! The cry is still, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season." People are looking for a church where the Bible is taught and preached, exciting, and relevant. It is the Word of God that changes lives! "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." 1 Peter 1:23. Yes, the Bible is our textbook.

3. WE ARE CHRISTIANS ONLY - We wear the name "Christian" which identifies us as "belonging to Christ." We are not ABC or XYZ Christians, but Christians only. We preface the name with no other. We are neither Catholic nor Protestant. Acts 11:26 teaches, "The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch."

I cannot emphasize strongly enough how wonderfully appealing this is to those who are seeking a walk with God. It is like a breath of fresh air to know that it is possible to be just a Christian. Yes, we are Christians only.

4. WE BAPTIZE BY IMMERSION FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT -By the time I get to this 4th "finger exercise", they are ready to hear more. We know, of course, that we need much teaching on the subject of baptism. The denominational world has wrecked the minds of its members on the subject of baptism. I simply take the prospect from Matthew 28:18-20, to Mark 16:15,16, to Acts 2:38. Jesus commanded baptism and the church in the Book of Acts preached and obeyed it. We need not apologize nor soften our stand on what the Bible says about baptism. It is by immersion and it is for the forgiveness of sin. It is not an option. The Bible relates baptism to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), the putting on of Christ (Galatians 3:27), and to salvation (Mark 16:16). I also emphasize God abiding in the Christian through the Holy Spirit Who comes at baptism. What makes us unique? We baptize by immersion for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

5. WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER EVERY LORD'S DAY - How foreign this is to most churches today. The weekly observance of communion is taught in the New Testament. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 20:7 tells us that "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread..." There is also much teaching in the epistles on the subject. Plus, our Lord said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

I try not to get too weighty on any of these five things in this initial visit. But, in less than an hour you can give them a birds-eye view of who we are and what we believe. If you are looking for a way to "break the ice" in that first visit, I suggest that you might want to use my "five-finger exercise."

1. *Christians Only* by James Deforest Murch, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1962), p. 103.

2. *Christianity Restored* by Alexander Campbell (Printed and Published by McVay and Ewing, Bethany, VA., 1835) p. 7.

3. *Facts Concerning the New Testament Church* by P.H. Welshimer (Published by Standard Publishing), p. 4.