

Streamers

CHAPTER TWO



The Book Matters

Lesson 2A: Can You Follow the Directions?

Lesson 2B: Who is Writing the Test?

Essential Questions:

1. Why is the Bible so essential in helping us find *what really matters*?
2. What part did knowing and following the Bible play in the Barton Stone's life?
Why did founders especially look to the New Testament?
3. What is the individual Christian's part in receiving and applying God's word in the Bible?



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CHAPTER 2 The Book Matters

THE GRASS
WITHERS,
THE FLOWER
FADES, BUT
THE WORD
OF OUR GOD
STANDS
FOREVER.

- ISAIAH 40:8 NKJV

One of the teachers...asked him,
"Of all the commandments, which is most important?"
"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this:
**"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind
and with all your strength.'**
The second is this: **'Love your neighbor as your self.'**
There is no commandment greater than these."
-Mark 12: 28, 29-31 NIV

YOUR WORD IS
A LAMP
TO MY FEET
AND A LIGHT
FOR MY PATH.
-PSALM 119: 105 NIV

ALL SCRIPTURE IS
GOD-BREATHED
AND IS USEFUL
FOR TEACHING,
REBUKING,
CORRECTING
AND TRAINING IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS,
SO THAT ALL
GOD'S PEOPLE
MAY BE
THOROUGHLY
EQUIPPED FOR
EVERY GOOD
WORK.

-2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 NIV

***I have hidden
your words in
my heart
that I might not
sin against you.***

-Psalm 119:11 NIV

...SO IS MY WORD THAT
GOES OUT FROM MY
MOUTH: IT WILL NOT
RETURN TO ME EMPTY,
BUT WILL ACCOMPLISH
WHAT I DESIRE AND
ACHIEVE THE PURPOSE
FOR WHICH I SENT IT.

-ISAIAH 55:3 NIV

Let the peace of Christ rule in
your hearts, since as members
of one body you were called to
peace. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in
you richly as you teach and
admonish one another with all
wisdom, and as you sing
psalms, hymns and spiritual
songs with gratitude in your
hearts to God.

And whatever you do,
whether in word or deed, do it
all in the name of the Lord
Jesus, giving thanks to God the
Father through him.

-Colossians 3:15-17 NIV

If the reader
understands very little of
the word of God, he
ought to read it very
much; for the Spirit
explains the word by
the word.

The frequent reading of
the Scriptures creates a
delight in them, so that
the more we read them,
the more we desire
to do so.

-George Müller

He then, that would interpret the Oracles
of God to the salvation of his soul,
must approach this volume with the
humility and docility of a child,
and meditate upon it day and night.

Like Mary, he must sit at the
Master's feet, and listen to the words
that fall from his lips.

To such a one there is an assurance of
understanding, a certainty of knowledge,
to which the man of letters alone
never attained, and which
the mere critic never felt.

-Alexander Campbell, in *The Christian System*

The person who opens
the Book of God with
one aim and one
ardent desire—
the only intent being to
know the will of God—
to such a person the
knowledge is easy.
The Bible is framed to
illuminate things for
this purpose.

-Alexander Campbell



LESSON 2A: Can you Follow the Directions?

Sarah gets a new board game for her birthday. She and her friends decide to play the game, which none of them have ever seen before. All watch eagerly as Sarah cuts the wrapping and opens the box. Anticipation builds as she lifts out the game board and unfolds it onto the table in front of them. As they take in the colorful scenes and winding pathways, eyes fly around the new board, and players whisper “ooh!” and “aah.”

Domingo opens two differently colored packs of cards and stacks them neatly on designated places on the board. As Tim opens and empties the bag of colorful game markers, all grab for their favorite color. Preston empties another tiny bag, and all marvel at the intricately crafted figures. From the bottom of the carefully packed box, Sandhya lifts a set of colorful game spinners. All set their markers on the board in anticipation of beginning. So, what do they do next?

Did you answer, “Read the directions?” Games like the one described are designed to be hours of fun, if you follow the directions. Most groups playing a new game like this will even keep the directions close at hand, ready to consult as new things come up during play.

What would happen if the players ignored the fact that they had directions, each moving about the board as they pleased, making their own rules as they went along? Before long, things could end up in a terrible mess. A fun start could end up in an ugly free-for-all.

Now, we should make it clear: *our lives are not a board game.* God does *not* move us around the great gameboard of life as colored markers, although some days it may feel that way, as though you keep landing on *Lose your turn!* or *Go back 3 spaces!* Life is far more serious than a game. And we have only one chance at it.

On the other hand, *God did not leave us here without directions.* Quite the contrary. From the first, God has gone to great lengths to give people guidelines for living and working together, and for living the abundantly rich lives God has planned for them.

But for whatever reason, God’s people have always had trouble with directions, having a way of losing, forgetting, ignoring, changing or complicating them, each to their own liking. Many people seem to want to make the rules themselves for the rest of the world to go by, and they become angry when this doesn’t happen. Even after God narrowed the directions down to ten essentials, people still had issues with them.

So, God sent Jesus to make things clear. Face to face, Jesus was able to spell out God’s plans for us, narrowing things down to the most essential—then even walking folks through it all. So, just which of God’s commandments did Jesus say were most essential? When someone asked that very question of Jesus, he replied: *Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

The Greatest Commandment:

Jesus’ answer has come to be known as *The Greatest Commandment* and *The Great Commandment*. Check it out for yourself in the scriptures below. Whether you are a new or a long-time Christian, these essential directions of Christ should be at the heart of all you think and do.

→ Matthew 22: 37, 39

→ Luke 10:25-27

→ Mark 12:29-31

→ John 13:34-35

Jesus traveled about the land teaching and giving examples to help people understand. Tens of thousands heard him speak, and many of these people went on to share with others what they had learned.

But, some in that day had great trouble accepting Jesus’ directions. In fact, Jesus was put to death because the leaders didn’t understand how the directions fit in. Jesus’ directions for life became another essential:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- John 3:16 (NIV)

Jesus was the Christ, the Savior who had given his life for God’s people. Christ became the instrument in God’s plan for all the times when people got the directions wrong and messed up—in small or big ways.

After Jesus rose from death, he spent a little more time with his disciples before returning to his Father. Jesus’ last directions to his followers were to go out, teaching other people the lessons they had learned from him. We call this **the good news**—the **gospel**—of Jesus Christ. These directions are considered another essential, called **The Great Commission**:

→ Matthew 28:19

→ Mark 16:15

→ Acts 1:4-8

Because Jesus’ followers gave eyewitness accounts of what they had seen and heard in their years at his side, writers were able to pass these teachings down to us in the **Gospels** of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John of the *New Testament*. The *New Testament* also contains letters from the apostles to each other and to the rapidly growing groups of Christ’s followers. These letters urged **Christians** to come together into one spiritual body, called **church**, to carry on God’s work in the world.

Despite others’ efforts to destroy its words, the Bible is as strong as ever in the 21st century, and translated into more languages every day. The wonder of it all is that each of us can read for ourselves Jesus’ words, passed down through the centuries. These words can help connect us as one people in God. But what really matters about these words is *what we do with them*.

... **We have to read the directions!**

This was the essential belief of the Stone-Campbell founders: *Those who attempt to follow Christ must begin by reading the directions. The Bible must be the main guide we have to help us live our lives the way God directs us to live.*



LESSON 2A: Questions for Thought and Reflection

1. Has your life ever felt as though you're playing a game with no directions? If so, what might have happened to the directions?
2. Jesus said that all of the other commandments are based on loving God and loving one's neighbor. How do you interpret this statement?
3. Would you say *The Greatest Commandment* is easy or tough to understand? Easy or tough to accomplish? Explain.
4. Speaking from firsthand experience, how easy is it for you to love each of these as God said to love? Explain.
a. family b. friends c. strangers d. enemies e. self
5. Is it possible that people *who only love those who love them back*—such as their friends, family, and romantic partners—are mainly just experiencing a love of *what others can give them*? When we genuinely love an enemy or someone who has hurt us, how is this love different? (Do you notice a difference in the way you feel in each situation?) How does trying to see others *through Christ's eyes* help us live according to the *Great Commandment*?
6. How do you think the *priesthood of each believer* connects to how we should see and use the Bible?
7. Is an *open* or a *closed* Bible a better symbol of God's gift to us? How would you sketch your Bible?
8. Many people have these Bible verses memorized. How do they connect with us trying to follow God's directions?
"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105, NIV)
"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11, NIV)
9. Do you think that memorized Bible passages, poems, and sayings are more helpful to us in our easy or our rough times? Explain. Can you give any examples from your own or someone else's experiences?
10. Suppose you could write a computer program that would instantly 'download' Bible verses into a volunteer's mental memory. Due to technological limitations, this program could only hold up to five passages, and would need to use the same ones for everyone. What verses pop into your mind that you might want to include? Why?
11. Until you are able to design the program described in #10, what alternatives could accomplish the same result?
12. What advice can you and those in your group give each other to help in memorizing scripture?
13. Imagine a drawing showing someone being "fed" the Bible as though the Bible were actual food. Now think of these two versions of the cartoon. One shows a child being spoon-fed by another individual. Another shows a child enthusiastically sticking a spoon into the 'food' and feeding himself. Which would you choose to represent yourself, and why?
14. Do you own a personal Bible that fits your level of learning and need? Where could someone in your church go to get involved in a Bible study on their particular level of understanding?



Getting a Sense of the Bible

MEDITATION: Getting a 'Sense' of the Bible

1. Take a Bible, and without talking to anyone else, set it in front of you and open it.
2. Turn to a particular scriptural passage that is meaningful to you. John 3:16 is one passage that works well.
3. Now, lay your hand gently over the page of scripture and either look away or close your eyes.
4. Feel the page of scripture with your hand and fingers. Move your hand gently across the page, thinking about the significance of this treasure of God available to you.
5. Think of the significance of the words in the Bible to you.
6. Think of the people through the ages who were martyred (killed for) reading, owning, or sharing the Bible with others when it was illegal to do so. Think of those in the world today who risk their lives by owning and reading the Bible. Would you do the same?
7. Think about why people today may ignore or take the Bible lightly. Have you ever been guilty of this?
8. Think about how your life, actions, and daily habits can reflect to others the directions God has for the world to follow.
9. Think about a verse of scripture you want to keep in your heart this week, and ask for God's help with this.
10. Say a silent prayer of thanks to God for putting this Word at your fingertips.

Notes and Reflections:

HELPS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Paraphrased from ALEXANDER CAMPBELL's *work in The Christian System* (1839)

RULE 1: HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

On opening any book of the Bible, first consider the historical circumstances of the book. These are the:

TITLE—AUTHOR—DATE—PLACE—OCCASION

RULE 2: SPEAKER, AUTHORITY, AND AUDIENCE

These questions are essential for proper understanding of rules, instructions, commands, promises, warnings, discipline, teachings, encouragement, persuasion, and so forth.

a) **WHO IS THE SPEAKER?**

b) **WHAT IS THE SPEAKER'S AUTHORITY?**

- What right does the speaker have to speak about this subject?
- Whose viewpoint is the speaker representing on the subject?
- How well does the speaker know about what he/she is saying?

c) **WHO IS THE AUDIENCE AND WHY ARE THEY BEING SPOKEN TO?**

Are they Jews or Christians? Believers or non-believers? Approved or disapproved?

RULE 3: LITERARY & HISTORICAL LOGIC

Understand that the Bible uses many of the same language and literary devices, such as stories, hymns, poetry, parables, and histories, as do other forms of literature. The same logic and common sense used to interpret works in these other forms of literature should also be used as tools for helping to understand similar works in the Bible.

RULE 4: WORD MEANING

- a) **Single Meaning:** If a word has a single meaning commonly accepted at the time of the writing, use that common meaning. Use authoritative references of that time period to determine this common meaning.
- b) **Mixed Meaning:** When a word has more than one meaning, including those literal and figurative, use the scope and context of the word, or parallel passages, to help interpret the intended meaning.
- c) **Undetermined Use:** Sometimes a word has more than one meaning, but other clues fail in assuring us of meaning. In this case we can have no certainty in the correct meaning of that word or passage.

RULE 5: INTERPRETING LITERARY DEVICES & FIGURES OF SPEECH:

When literary devices are used in a passage, think about *point of resemblance*:

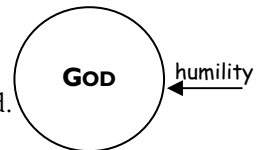
- a) What type of literary device does it most resemble, such as poem, allegory, parable, hyperbole, metaphor, or simile?
- b) How does this device help create understanding of the intended meaning?

RULE 6: EXTENDING FROM COMPARISONS

When interpreting material such as symbols, types, allegories, and parables: determine the point that is intended to be illustrated, but then do not extend beyond that point.

RULE 7: CIRCLE OF UNDERSTANDING GOD

- a) To understand the Bible, we must come within the **understanding distance** of God. Imagine **God at the center** of a circle, and **humility** as the circle's circumference. An example of this is when a person speaks: one who is too far away to hear what the other person is saying is *beyond the hearing distance*, so **outside the circle of understanding**. In the same way, when God is speaking (such as God does through those who have written the Scriptures), those who want to hear God's voice must get close enough to the scripture to hear what is being said. Each must come within **hearing distance**; that is, each must get close enough to hear what God is saying.
- b) Within the circle it is easy to understand God's voice giving guidance toward faithfulness and moral lives. *"The person who opens the Book of God with one aim and one ardent desire—the only intent being to know the will of God—to such a person the knowledge is easy. The Bible is framed to illuminate things for this purpose."*
- c) All who are the beyond understanding distance cannot understand God in the way God has intended people to understand. Literary critiques beyond the circle are simply that, critiques of literature, and not of God's word.



-DP



USING ALEXANDER CAMPBELL'S 'HELPS FOR INTERPRETING THE BIBLE':

In 1839, Alexander Campbell wrote a book, *The Christian System*, that contained seven rules to help people better understand the meaning of the Bible passages they read. The page included in our study is a summary and paraphrasing of these rules. Read over the guidelines.

1. Do you understand what Campbell describes as *the circle of understanding*? What meaning does this have for a person trying to study the Bible?
2. The passages below are good practice for using the guidelines. Using any or all of the passages, in group or individually, consider how Campbell's suggestions do or do not help understand the passage:

Rule 1: Historical Consideration: Title-Author-Date-Place-Occasion

Exodus 20:1-21; 21:1-25

Matthew 5:38-48

Acts 7:54 - 8:1

Song of Songs 4:1-3

Hebrews 11

Rule 2: Speaker, Authority, and Audience

Matthew 7: 15-28

Acts 11:1-18

John 12:4-5

Romans 8:28-39

1 Corinthians 7:1-10, 25-31

Amos 5: 21-27

Rule 3: Literary and Historical Logic

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Psalms 121

Proverbs 10

Matthew 6: 9-14

Luke 8: 4-15

1 Corinthians 13

Rule 4: Word Meaning

Psalms 46: 1-3

Matthew 5: 1-10

Luke 14: 26-27, 33

Rule 5: Interpreting Literary Devices and Figures of Speech / Rule 6: Extending

Matthew 5: 13-16; 29-30

Matthew 7:3-5, Matthew 19: 23-26

Mark 4:30-32

Psalms 23

1 Corinthians 12:14-27

Rule 7: Circle of Understanding

Matthew 25:34-46

Luke 15:3-6

Luke 18: 15-17

John 15:1-17



Lesson 2B: WHO IS WRITING THE TEST?

Imagine that you are in school and it is...*(take a deep breath)*...*Exam Day*. You and fellow students sit tensely, waiting for the test. Around you, people fidget. Nibble nervously at pencils and fingernails. Twirl their pencils. Twirl their hair. Twirl their feet. Check for the fifteenth time to see if the pencils are sharp enough.

Suddenly, in strides a classmate carrying a very tall stack of papers. He immediately begins handing out packets labeled "Test" to each student. *"Two hundred and fifty questions!?! You're not even our teacher!"* a student bellows in disbelief. The test-giver laughs while continuing his work, "Yeah, you should have seen it before I narrowed it down. I had 832 questions to begin with."

Just then a girl from the back of the room jumps up. "Hold everything. You can't do this!" She jabs the test with a pointed finger. "Look at it!" "Your test has *nothing to do* with what the teacher said to study!" Then, reaching into her book bag, she announces, "Now *this*," waving a stack of papers, "is *exactly* what the teacher wants us to know." She steps carefully into the aisle and begins neatly placing a stapled packet onto each desk, making sure not to neglect her own.

"WAIT...WAIT...WAIT!" Comes a voice from the front row. "You *both* have it wrong. *This test*"—waving one of his copies, "is what the teacher wants us to know." The student beams and looks down at his classmates. *"I should know. I talked to the teacher personally just yesterday."*

About that time, seventeen other people jump from their seats, each waving their own stacks of paper. Their loud, insistent voices meld into a horrible, chaotic din. *"I'm having a nightmare!"* your mind screams.

You don't even notice the nine other people rising from their seats, waving about their own stacks of paper, because you are too busy rummaging in your book bag for the test you wrote and copied off for the class.

What do you think of the story? Have you felt this way? If so, you may be able to relate to a similar feeling that drove the Stone-Campbell founders away from such tests. The founders were greatly troubled by churches, including the ones they were in, using human-written belief statements (called **creeds** or **confessions**) as **tests of fellowship** into Christ's church, into Christ's body of believers. *Back to our dream.*

Suddenly you see your neighbor's eyes widen. Papers from around the room flop and flutter to the floor. Students slide silently into their seats, unable to take their eyes from the front of the room. *The Teacher* stands there, intent, and perhaps a little sad. What is the Teacher holding? Papers, too. Not stapled, just one page. You look down to see that a new page is before you.

The Teacher announces, *"I have given each of you a copy of the test so that you may see it in writing."* The Teacher smiles and continues, *"but, you need to know that this test is an oral test. Each of you will be called before me to answer on your own, as your name is called."* You look down at your paper, and it hits you hard:

A single question:

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and do you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

CREEDS & TESTS OF FELLOWSHIP

The Stone-Campbell founders didn't want to write another test—just to use *Christ's* test. They believed that as each one heard Christ calling, each must in turn answer *to Christ*, not to any human authority. Religious leaders of that day, just as in Christ's day and today, were all too eager to take the tests from Christ's hands and insert their own, then stand by ready to grade them.

"I have too much evidence of my liability to err to make my present opinions a test by which to judge the hearts of my fellow Christians."

-Barton W. Stone

The founders believed that although Christ called each of us to *confess our belief before others*, Christ never said we were to grade each others' answers, or to add another list of own questions to the test. Check the following:

→ Romans 10: 9-13

Continuing with this idea, the founders believed that Jesus knew quite well what he was doing when he gave us his teachings. Long, human-made creeds and confessions could confuse people and cloud their idea of what was most important in following Christ. The well-worn slogan guiding Stone-Campbell churches became, **"No creed but Christ."**

What about human-written statements of beliefs written as guides for us, not **tests of fellowship**? Most believed these could be used as *guides*, as long as they kept our focus *on*, and *not away from*, Christ's essentials.

In a similar way, the early founders believed that it was not the place of one Christian or group of Christians to write the test measuring the truth of another Christian's belief in Christ. Recognizing that God speaks differently to each believer and that each believer's path to God is personal and unique, then judging others' beliefs was to be left up to God. Another motto grew from this belief: **"Not the only Christians, but Christians only."**

What do we do instead of writing the tests? Stone-Campbell churches adopted yet another motto here—one that goes back centuries, credited to various authors: **"In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity."** or: **"In essentials, unity, in opinions, liberty, and in all things love."**

This means that within the body of Christ's believers, we allow each other the **liberty** to seek God's truth for themselves, rather than condemning them for not seeing it our way. Today, Stone-Campbell Christians represent an enormously wide range of opinions on everything from politics, society, religion, Biblical interpretation,—and even buying carpet for the church building.

As with a group of people holding hands and standing in a circle, so it is with the church. As with our hands, we overlap in an essential place—*our belief in Christ and love for each other*—while the rest of us are the wonderfully, uniquely diverse people of God.





Questions for Thought and Reflection:

- Tests** are necessary in life—and not just in school. Surgeons must pass tests to perform surgery. Pilots must pass tests before they can fly an airplane. What other tests come to mind?
- If students in school could write their own tests, what kind of questions would they be most likely to *omit* from the test?
- We want the tests we take to be **fair**, that is, to do a good job of measuring what they are supposed to measure. In the testing world this is called **validity**. Tests that have no validity are usually not worth taking. Here are two examples:
 - A thermometer stuck into a person’s mouth would *not* be a valid test of blood pressure.
 - A test spoken in Japanese to see if someone knows the three primary colors might be valid for young Japanese students—but not someone who doesn’t speak Japanese—for them, it would be more a test of language than of colors.
 Have you ever had to take a test that you felt was not **valid**? If so, how did this feel?
- Tests of fellowship** are more a part of life than we would like to think. For some reason they can **hook us** pretty quickly. Maybe our human nature drives us *to want to pass tests* or *to be accepted*. Sometimes we even write the tests ourselves. Think about these examples. What does each “test” claim to measure? Is the ‘writer’ an authority? Are any of them valid?

“You can’t be ‘popular’ if you hang out with people like her .”	“You can’t be a Christian if you believe in dinosaurs.”
“You don’t love me or you’d let me go to the party.”	“If you wanna be somebody, you gotta smoke weed.”
“Hey man, making a 98 on a math test is just not cool.”	“If you were really my friend, you would loan me the money.”
“If you love Jesus, forward this e-mail to 10 friends.”	“If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she is.”— <i>Luke 7:39</i>
“I thought he was a Christian until I saw how he voted on that.”	“Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God!”—(<i>Matthew 27.39-40</i>)

 Can you think of other examples that you’ve run up against lately? Do you see any thing common to such tests?
- Harmful *tests of fellowship* do often follow a pattern. One way to recognize them is to think: *small-small-small*:
 - The “test”giver is often in a lower position (*small person*) or has no real authority to make the test they are giving.
 - The test-giver may be trying to manipulate another person to *shrink their circle* (make it *smaller*). Perhaps getting someone to do this gives the test-giver a sense of power, security, or control.
 - Those who *do give in* to the manipulation typically feel “*smaller*” for allowing themselves to be ‘brought down.’ What do you think of these guidelines? Do any of these apply to the examples in #4 (or those in your own experience)?
- Jesus himself was often given invalid tests. Check out the example in *Matthew 4:1-11* and *Luke 4: 4:1-13*:
 - Do the “tests” in the passages fit the pattern described in #6?
 - How does Jesus’ respond to the test giver (*Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12*)? What do you think of his response?
 - Did you notice the surprising thing the test giver does in this passage? (*Look in Luke 4:10; Matthew 4:6*). What help is this in taking the religious tests that ‘just anyone’ writes for us?
- A quick tip for dealing with non-valid tests is to do what Jesus did: **refuse to play**. Don’t take the bait. Question 5 advises us to see such tests as *small*. In connection, a guideline for ‘answering’ such tests is to think, *bigger*. That is, by refusing to take the test, your own circle will grow *bigger*. You may even help others into a *bigger* way of seeing things. What do you think of this “test” given by one Christian to another, and the response to the test?

“Young lady, Christians don’t have pink hair and nose rings!”

“I hear you, saying that because of how I look, I don’t pass your test of being a Christian. As much as I care about you and respect your opinions, I gotta tell you. The test I have to worry most about is the one that God is going to be grading me with. From what I read, pink hair is further on down the list than us loving each other.”

Smiling, “I sure do hope we can each keep doing that—despite how different we may look to each other.”

Test:
Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and do you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?

The point of the response to non-valid tests of fellowship is not “payback.” Rather it is to just keep on following Christ’s tests, remembering Christ’s **command** (not suggestion) to love others (including strangers and enemies). Sometimes a loving answer may not be easy to give, popular with others, or even bring a loving response. Some answers could even get you into ‘hot water,’ as Thomas Campbell discovered as he tried to widen his circle. Sometimes one must simply respond with their daily actions. The point is: **When all is said and done, whose test is going to be graded, anyway?** Now return to Question #4. See if you can suggest some appropriate Christ-focused ways of responding to any of the ‘tests’ being given.



Questions for Thought and Reflection: (continued)

8. The statement below was made by a church leader who was opposed Barton Stone's way of seeing things. Does the statement contain a 'test'? What does it tell you about the way Barton Stone chose to respond to such tests?
"B.W. Stone has done more harm by his good conduct than by all his preaching and writing, because... he has lived so much like a Christian, that the people take him to be one." — opponent of Barton Stone's views
9. How many times lately have you used the word, "irenic"? If you said, "Huh?" you are not alone. *Irenic* is not used much nowadays. Pronounced "**i-REN-ick**" and less often "**i-REE-nick**," this adjective must have been common in the 1800s, for it often shows up in accounts of meetings between Stone-Campbell leaders and those opposing them. So, here is a quick test for you: **Which is closest to the meaning of irenic?**
- a) mean-spirited, quarrelsome and self-seeking
 - b) spiteful; consumed with a need to achieve revenge
 - c) promoting peace, not disturbed by strife or turmoil
 - d) expecting one thing to happen and something else happens
 - e) the dialect of one who is from Ireland, Scotland or surrounding lands

(For a hint, one of the Stone-Campbell leaders that 'irenic' was used to describe was Barton Stone.) The correct answer?
c) *promoting peace, not disturbed by strife or turmoil.*

Irenic comes from the Greek, *eirēnikos*, which means *peace*—the same word used by Jesus' in his famous *Sermon on the Mount*, where he says, "*Blessed are the peacemakers...*" (see *Matthew 5:9*). Here are some more definitions: "*favoring, conducive to, or working toward peace, moderation, or conciliation.*" "*Inclined or disposed to peace; not quarrelsome or unruly.*" "*Conducive to peace, as 'irenic attitude toward one's foes.'*" (*Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary, Peoples Online Dictionary*)

• *If they needed to put someone's picture in the dictionary to illustrate the definition: "irenic person" do any individuals that you know come to mind?*

Keep in mind that many of the Stone-Campbell folks described as showing an *irenic* spirit were rugged frontier types; such as Raccoon John Smith (Chapter 4). And the definitions say nothing about *irenic* meaning *weak* or 'lily-livered.' *Irenic* doesn't mean *giving up* or *giving in*—but just *getting along*—a type of teamwork so that goals can be reached without someone getting hurt or left out.

Do you think that one reason *irenic* is not used that much anymore is because, not only have most people forgotten what it means, but many have also forgotten how to be *irenic*? Maybe we should bring back *irenic*, a perfectly good word.

- Do you agree?
- Can 'irenic' walk around wearing pink hair, white hair, blue hair, no hair, or 'dreads'?
- What place do you think "irenic" has in the 21st century? In your congregation? In your home?

10. In Jesus' day, *Pharisees* were a bit like the *Reformers* of later times—intent on making sure their brothers and sisters in the synagogue knew of God's essential laws and how to follow them. However, Jesus had some very harsh words for the particular Pharisees he encountered; they seemed to have become so caught up in the letter of the law that they had lost touch with God's priorities. The Pharisee-graded tests of how others followed the law seemed to distort peoples' understanding about what mattered most before God. *Check out Matthew 23:13-30*. What can you learn from Jesus' words about such tests?
11. Not all *tests of fellowship* are bad. Jesus gave us some that help show us how to live. Four of these are listed below. How might you summarize each?
- Luke 9:23-26
 - John 13: 34-35
 - John 17:22-23
 - John 21: 15-19



Christ's Essential Question

The Bible's *New Testament* records a number of times when people asked Jesus about what was most important in life—what we'd call *essential questions*. Yet the *New Testament* records another essential question—and this time, *Jesus is the one asking it*. It came as Jesus and his disciples discussed people's different ideas about who Jesus was. (People still have such conversations today!) During their discussion, Jesus turned to his disciple Peter:

“But what about you?” [Jesus] asked. **“Who do you say I am?”**

Simon Peter answered,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.*

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

- Matthew 16: 15-18 NIV

The Great Confession

Peter got the answer right. His answer, known as **The Great Confession**, has been repeated over the years by millions of people, perhaps even countless ancestors of your own.

And Christ was right. The **church** that Christ was speaking of is the **body of Christ's believers**, connecting, serving, and telling others about Christ. After the earthly form of Christ had gone, leaving things in the disciples' hands, Peter helped bring the believers together, preaching and teaching—and forming the church that continues to live as the body of Christ's believers in the world today.

Peter was himself crucified for his devotion to Christ's cause—but his work was picked up and carried through the centuries by other disciples devoted to Christ.

Today Christ is still asking the question, but he isn't asking it of Peter. He is asking it of *each of us*.

When one has gotten close enough to get a better look at the one called Jesus the Christ and begun to wonder, *just who is this?*, they too, will come to know how it feels to have their Master turn to them and ask, **“Who do you say I am?”** The answer is one each Christian must answer alone, from their own heart. This is the starting point.

Peter's answer back then was also a starting point for the *church: the* body of Christ's believers working together on earth in Christ's service. Each person's answer is a starting point in becoming part of this very same *Body*.

Christ's essential question is not essential to a person *just once*. This question is essential every day, although sometimes other sounds are so loud that we allow them to drown out Christ's voice. Other times, perhaps we have wandered far enough away that we don't notice Christ looking our way.

If a disciple is going to keep focused on *what really matters* in life, the habit is to keep focused on Christ's essential question, every day and in every thing we do.

What is **your** answer when Christ turns to you and asks, **“Who do you say I am?”**



Streamers

CHAPTER 2 The Book Matters

Chapter 2 Notes: The Book Matters

