

## **THE 1906 DIVISION—PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY**

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It is a distinct pleasure for me to be here on the farm of Uncle Dave and Aunt Mag—David Lipscomb and Margaret Lipscomb, the generous benefactors of what is now Lipscomb University. Their home, Avalon, is still located on the campus. Not long ago, I visited that home where David Lipscomb lived from 1903 to 1917. David Lipscomb died in that house, located on this campus, on Sunday evening, November 11, 1917.

He was no ordinary man. The fact that this university bears his name may be a greater tribute to the university than to the man. David Lipscomb was undoubtedly one of the most influential men in the Restoration Movement. He was born in Franklin County in 1831. On July 23, 1862, he married Margaret Zellner. On September 23, 1863, they had a son whom they named Zellner Lipscomb. On June 26, 1864, at scarcely nine months of age, their baby died. It was a stunning blow that David Lipscomb never completely overcame. In later years, his tears would flow at the remembrance of his son.

It is astonishing to contemplate all that David Lipscomb achieved. He and his wife raised several children as their own. From the depths of poverty he became a prosperous farmer. In his biography of Lipscomb, Earl West stated: “He believed in working hard, staying out of debt, and practicing thrift. He never spent a nickel in his life unnecessarily and was a shrewd business man. . . . By the time he died, he had acquired a considerable amount of property, and yet, ironically enough, no man cared less for money than he” (West, 66).

David Lipscomb was a farmer, a preacher, a debater, an editor, and a teacher. The Gospel Advocate began in 1855 by Tolbert Fanning and others, but it ceased publication during

the Civil War. Lipscomb brought it back to life in 1866 and, along with E. G. Sewell, was editor for more than forty years. He and James A. Harding began the Nashville Bible School in 1891. Harding University in Arkansas is named after James A. Harding, and the Nashville Bible School ultimately became David Lipscomb College and then Lipscomb University. It is difficult to think of any man in the Restoration Movement who made more lasting contributions than David Lipscomb.

### **The 1906 Division**

In this year of 2006, we speak of “the 1906 division.” Exactly what was the 1906 division, and what did this have to do with David Lipscomb?

Interestingly, there was a man named Simon Newton Dexter North who was appointed the first director of the United States Census when it became a permanent agency in 1902. One aspect of the census was a “religious census” to report the existence and membership of churches in the United States. Up to this time, the Christian Churches or Disciples had been listed with the churches of Christ as one body, but North and his staff noticed in various publications that there appeared to be a separation between the two groups over the support of the Missionary Society and the use of instrumental music in the worship. North, therefore, wrote to David Lipscomb to inquire whether there were two separate bodies. Lipscomb replied, in language that has now become famous to historians. He stated:

As they increased in number and wealth, many desired to become popular also, and sought to adopt the very human inventions that in the beginning of the movement had been opposed—a general organization of the churches under a missionary society with a moneyed membership, and the adoption of instrumental music in the worship. This is a subversion of the fundamental principles on which the churches were based.

Based upon these premises, therefore Lipscomb concluded:

There is a distinct people taking the word of God as their only and sufficient rule of faith, calling their churches “churches of Christ” or “churches of God,” distinct in name, work, and rule of faith from all other bodies of people.

Therefore, in the religious census for 1906—one hundred years ago—churches of Christ and Christian Churches were listed separately. Two things should be pointed out: *First*, 1906 was not the beginning of the division. The division had existed for some time prior to 1906, but this was the first governmental recognition that the two bodies were not the same. Some have called it the year of the “formal division.” *Second*, the division was not altogether over the Missionary Society and the use of instrumental music in worship. These were simply the manifestations of the real cause. The actual cause of division was a difference in attitude toward the authority of the scriptures.

A. W. Fortune, a historian from the Disciples, accurately described the fundamental difference that led to division.

There were two different interpretations of the church which inevitably came into conflict. There were those who believed the church should move on with the rest of the world and adapt the spirit of the New Testament to conditions that were ever changing. They held that, when not forbidden by the New Testament, they were free to adapt their program to changing needs. On the other hand, there were those who believed the matter of the church was fixed for all time, and the fact that certain things were not sanctioned was sufficient ground for rejecting them. The men on both sides were equally honest, but they had a different approach to these issues that were raised. (Fortune, 364-365).

I find it fascinating that the most hotly discussed issue in the church today is the 1906 division, and you and I are here. We are on the grounds where the decisions were made, and we are only a few steps away from the home of the man whose name this university bears. He was at the heart and soul of this momentous occurrence.

## Where Did Lipscomb Stand?

Where did Lipscomb stand in all this? First, I think one must understand that Lipscomb was no radical. He was not a hothead. He was a plain and unassuming man. He differed considerably from his friend James A. Harding. Harding was always outspoken, eloquent, emotional, and passionate in his convictions. Lipscomb was slow to speak, deliberate, thoughtful, and not noted as a fervent speaker in the manner of Harding.

It was my privilege to meet and know Jesse P. Sewell, one-time president of Abilene Christian University. I was a teenage boy at the time, and brother Sewell was an elderly man, but I remember him well. In the Harding Lectures for 1950, brother Sewell described brother Lipscomb (under whom he was a student). He said: “There was the solid, substantial, dependable David Lipscomb, with his good judgment, strong unimpeachable character. He at all times stood like a stone wall against every innovation upon the authority of Jesus Christ as head of his church. He was slow of motion, physically and mentally. Always he was deliberate and calm.” Brother Lipscomb did not jump to conclusions. When the Missionary Society and instrumental music first became issues in the brotherhood, brother Lipscomb practiced forbearance. He was not the first to recommend division. He believed in manifesting patience with a brother as long as he was studying, learning, trying to know and ascertain the Lord’s will. Only after one showed a disposition to promote and force his innovations upon the church, did brother Lipscomb feel that fellowship could not continue.

But make no mistake about it. When David Lipscomb took a stand, he was resolute, he was determined, he was a Christian gentleman, but he stood like “a stone wall” for what he believed was right. He reminds me of the Old Testament prophets. I do not hesitate to say that I have great and sincere admiration for the man.

In my hand I hold a book that is one of my most precious possessions. It is entitled *Queries and Answers* by David Lipscomb. It was edited by J. W. Shepherd and published by the Gospel Advocate in 1910. I rarely take this book out of my library because it is old, it is fragile, and in the front inside cover, it has the words "PRIVATE LIBRARY OF G. C. BREWER." G. C. Brewer was one of my heroes. This book was given to me by Mrs. G. C. Brewer about two months after brother Brewer's death. She allowed me to go into his library and choose any book of his that I wanted to keep. Brewer was a student of Lipscomb, and in a way I was a student of Brewer, and therefore I claim some spiritual lineage to brother Lipscomb.

Brother Lipscomb was asked to comment on Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which some were using to justify instrumental music in worship. Lipscomb replied:

It is the sentiment that is sung that constitutes the worship; there is no acceptable worship in music distinct from the sentiment sung. The music of the song is only a means of impressing the sentiment sung more deeply on the hearts of both singer and hearer. What is sung must be the outgrowth of the word of God dwelling richly in the heart. It is to be done by speaking that word of God in song. The purpose is to praise God and teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in the heart to the Lord. No performance of an instrument can possibly grow out of the word of God in the heart; an instrument cannot speak that word either to praise God or to teach and admonish one another. The sound of the instrument drowns the words sung and hinders the teaching and admonition.

The use of the instrument hinders and destroys the essential purpose of the worship in song. It works an entire change in the song service; it sooner or later changes it from a service of praise to God and of teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs into a musical and artistic entertainment that pleases and cultivates the fleshly and sensuous nature. A more hurtful change could not be made in the worship than this change in its spirit and purpose (Lipscomb, 224-230).

When we read these words of Lipscomb, we want to check the date. It almost sounds as if he wrote yesterday or the day before. The problems faced in his day were not so different to

the ones we hear today, and the wisdom of Lipscomb seems as fresh now as when his words were first spoken.

The question in Lipscomb's day was much the same as now. People not only wanted to know whether the introduction of instrumental music was wrong, but was it a "fellowship issue"? Hear David Lipscomb once again:

It seems there cannot be a doubt but that the use of instrumental music in connection with the worship of God, whether used as a part of the worship or as an attractive accompaniment, is unauthorized by God and violates the oft-repeated prohibition to add nothing to, take nothing from, the commandments of the Lord. It destroys the difference between the clean and the unclean, the holy and the unholy, counts the blood of the Son of God unclean, and tramples under foot the authority of the Son of God. They have not been authorized by God or sanctified with the blood of his Son. A Christian loyal and true to the Lord Jesus Christ cannot use them, nor in any way countenance the setting aside the order of God by adding to or taking from his appointments, even in the smallest matters, as washing of hands. While forbearance and love should be exercised in showing the sinfulness of their use, when the church determines to introduce a service not required by God, he who believes it is wrong is compelled to refuse in any way to countenance or affiliate with the wrong. To do so is to sin against God and his own conscience and to encourage by example others to violate their consciences and the law of God; it is to lower the standard of regard for the authority of God.

That is Lipscomb, the founder of this university which bears his name. He was fearless, conscientious, knowledgeable, and determined to do the will of God at all costs. Two more questions were asked of Lipscomb, and they signify the depth of feeling and anxiety with which this question was confronted a century ago.

One said: "My lifelong friends and associates are in a church that uses an organ, and so also are my children and grandchildren. Shall I leave them or remain with them?" We will probably never know the number of families who faced this dilemma, but Lipscomb answered with the same honesty and earnestness which characterized his entire being. He said:

To leave them is to bear earnest testimony to them for the truth and to warn them that there is danger and ruin in departing from the law of God; to go with them is to affiliate with and build up the wrong and to encourage them in the way that

leads to ruin. To depart from the order of God to go with them is to love friends, father, mother, brothers, and sisters more than God.

Finally, one other question was propounded to Lipscomb that doubtless has been faced by many others over the years. The questioner said: "I am opposed to the use of instrumental music in the worship and protest against it. Will God hold me responsible if I worship where an instrument is used?" Once again, Lipscomb, with careful thought, responded:

Pilate protested against the crucifixion of Jesus, yet went with the party that crucified him. Was he guiltless? The protest is the proof of conscious guilt in participating in the wrong.

Whatever one may think of Lipscomb, one thing is certain. He was a man of conviction, honor, and integrity. James A. Harding once said, "Brother Lipscomb is the greatest man on the continent" (West, 214).

### **J. W. McGarvey**

Not everyone agreed with brother Lipscomb. J. W. McGarvey was strongly opposed to the use of instrumental music in worship. When the Broadway church in Lexington, Kentucky, introduced the instrument, brother McGarvey moved his membership to the Chestnut Street church rather than to be a part of it. Yet, throughout his life, brother McGarvey preached for churches that had the instrument, and he maintained fellowship with those who used it. He is often cited today as an example of how things should be done even now. At the death of McGarvey, James A. Harding, co-founder of this school with Lipscomb, wrote: "One of the greatest Bible teachers of post-apostolic times left us when J. W. McGarvey died. I doubt if there has lived on the earth since the Apostle John a man who more thoroughly understood the two covenants of the Divine Word and their relations to each other; who could handle with such clearness, ease and vigor, the facts and truths of inspiration. No advocate of error was a match for him in discussing the truthfulness of the Bible records; no man among us so ready, clear and

powerful in crushing the false doctrines of infidels and atheists.” But James A. Harding continued his review of McGarvey’s life in the following solemn words: “There are few of the great and good whose lives are not marked by some serious blemish, some dark spot, a spot that seems all the darker because of the brightness and beauty that shine around it. And, it seems to me, our beloved brother, although so wise and great and good, did not escape the common lot of frail humanity. Brother McGarvey was bold and strong in declaring his opposition to the use of an organ in the worship of the church. He would not abide in a congregation that regularly used instrumental music in its worship. . . .And here arises the matter in which, it seems to me, he failed: while he would not abide in a church that regularly used the instrument, it was not at all uncommon for him to accept an invitation to preach for a congregation that regularly used it. He often did this. And herein, it seems to me, is the dark spot in this wonderfully bright life.” (Harding).

I mentioned earlier that I had the distinct privilege of meeting Jesse P. Sewell. It was in his older years when he resided in an apartment on the Harding campus. I read a story by brother Sewell about J. W. McGarvey. It is a story which many have never heard. I would like to share it with you in brother Sewell’s own words:

Brother McGarvey said to me: “Brother Sewell, I want to say something to you, if you’ll accept it in the spirit in which I mean it.” I told him I’d appreciate anything he had to say to me. He said about these words, “You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don’t ever let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshipping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that it was the only way to do it. I’ve never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinction between churches that used it and churches that didn’t. I’ve gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today.” He said, “It won’t work.”

Perhaps if men are going to quote McGarvey as an example for the present day, they should quote all of what he said. Brother Sewell commented, “That experience has been an inspiration to me all the days of my life since. It has helped me, when I was ever tempted to turn aside and go along with error, to remember the warning of this great old man” (Sewell, 75).

### **H. Leo Boles**

You may be interested to know that David Lipscomb was never president of Nashville Bible School, which became David Lipscomb College and Lipscomb University; he served as chairman of the Board of Trustees. But, H. Leo Boles was twice president of David Lipscomb College—from 1913 to 1920 and again from 1923 to 1932. Counting his time as teacher, president, and member of the Board of Trustees, H. Leo Boles was with this institution for nearly a third of a century. Brother Boles was president of the school at the time David Lipscomb died, he was a pallbearer at Lipscomb’s funeral, and he named his son Leo Lipscomb Boles. He was a great-grandson to the famous pioneer preacher “Raccoon John Smith.”

In 1939, there was a notable unity meeting conducted in Indianapolis between those who used instrumental music and those who did not. This meeting was not unlike some meetings that are transpiring even in our own day. H. Leo Boles, student of Lipscomb, admirer of Lipscomb, and in some respects, the successor to Lipscomb, was invited to address those who were assembled. In words of deep conviction and earnestness, brother Boles pled: “Brethren, put away the organ and you will be where the pioneers first stood when the unity of God’s people was enjoyed. The churches of Christ are standing now on this item just where the pioneers stood before its introduction in 1859; there was unity then on this point and there can be unity now at this point when the organ is pushed aside” (Boles). The speech by brother Boles was considered a landmark, and it was published in both the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Standard*.

James A. Harding, the first president of the school, H. Leo Boles, twice president of David Lipscomb College, and David Lipscomb himself, teacher and benefactor, all stood together in opposition to instrumental music and to any compromise with those who introduced it.

### **Conclusion**

I marvel when I think about the courage and determination of David Lipscomb amidst much opposition, criticism, and anxiety. He was pictured in a cartoon by his opposition as an old woman in a dress, holding a broom, trying to sweep back the tide. J. B. Briney of the Christian Church once addressed the Tennessee Missionary Society by suggesting the need of a “few first-class funerals.” No one doubted that Lipscomb was the object of these remarks.

When I think of David Lipscomb, I think of the Old Testament prophet Micaiah. King Ahab of Israel desired to go up into battle at Ramoth-gilead, but he knew he needed help. When King Jehoshaphat of Judah came for a visit, Ahab entreated him for assistance. Jehoshaphat said, “Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today” (I Kgs. 22:5). Old Ahab called together about four hundred prophets and asked them, “Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.” These four hundred prophets knew what to say; they understood what was the popular side; they wanted to please the king. But Jehoshaphat was suspicious that all four hundred of them said the same thing, and he asked, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?” A courier was sent to fetch Micaiah. When the courier arrived, he advised Micaiah that all the prophets in Ahab’s court had said the same thing. He admonished Micaiah, “Let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.”

The answer of Micaiah is, to me, the summation of the faithful prophet. These are some of my favorite words in the entire Bible. Micaiah replied: “As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak” (I Kgs. 22:14). In my book, that was David Lipscomb. He was a Micaiah. He did not seek to please the king. His only thought, wish, and desire was to please the Lord.

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