

Stone, Barton Warren ^[1]



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by William S. Powell, 1994

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Barton Warren Stone, evangelist and author, was born near Port Tobacco, Md., the son of John and Mary Warren Stone and a descendant of the first Protestant governor of Maryland. When Stone was quite young, the family moved to Pittsylvania County, Va., just across the North Carolina state line, where he spent his youth not far from Danville. Intending to become a lawyer, he entered the academy conducted in [Guilford County](#) ^[2], N.C., by the Reverend [David Caldwell](#) ^[3]. Although he had grown up in the Anglican church, Stone was swayed by the preaching of the Reverend [James McGready](#) ^[4] in North Carolina and there became a candidate for the ministry in the Orange Presbytery in 1793. Not completely satisfied with the theology to which he was exposed, he went to his brother's home in Oglethorpe County, Ga., and obtained a teaching position in a Methodist school in the adjacent county of Wilkes. He returned to North Carolina in 1796, was licensed by the Orange Presbytery, and then took charge of several congregations in Tennessee and Kentucky. Despite his reservations with respect to the Confession, he accepted ordination "so far as I can see it consistent with the word of God." He still felt uneasy with some aspects of Calvinism, however.

The Great Revival of the early nineteenth century brought his objections into focus, and with four other ministers he withdrew from the Orange Presbytery and formed a new Presbyterian Synod. Within a year, convinced that there was no scriptural authority for synods, they dissolved the organization in June 1804 and for a time were referred to as "Stoneites." Other groups separated from the Methodist Episcopal church. Baptist congregations soon joined them, and they came to be called Christians with no creed except the Bible. Stone spent the remainder of his life organizing new congregations in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee; he also sometimes taught school and in 1826 established a periodical, the *Christian Messenger* ^[5].

Along the way Stone made the acquaintance of Alexander Campbell, leader of a group known as the Disciples of Christ. The two men led their followers into a cooperative relationship, and at a conference in Lexington, Ky., on 1 Jan. 1832, the Christians and the Disciples agreed to act as a unit. A Disciple became coeditor of the *Messenger*. Although he never gave up the title Christian, Stone considered the union to be "the noblest act of my life." He was the author of a number of published letters, addresses, tracts, and books and wrote part two of the *Apology of the Springfield Presbytery* (1803), which has been cited as the first declaration of religious freedom in the Western Hemisphere. He also composed a hymn, "The Lord Is the Fountain of Goodness and Love."

In 1801 Stone married Elizabeth Campbell, who died in 1810; by her he had five children. In 1811 he married her cousin, Celia Wilson Bowen, and soon afterwards settled in Lexington, Ky. They were the parents of six children. In 1834 he moved to Jacksonville, Ill., and extended his work into Missouri. While on a preaching tour, Stone died at the home of his son-in-law, Captain S. A. Bowen, in Hannibal, Mo., and was buried in the cemetery at Cane Ridge, Ky.

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[Religious Leaders and Clergy](#) [19]

[Writers, journalists, and editors](#) [20]

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[Powell, William S.](#) [21]

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[Guilford County](#) [22]

[Greensboro](#) [23]

[High Point](#) [24]

[Jamestown](#) [25]

[McLeansville](#) [26]

[Whitsett](#) [27]

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1 January 1994 | Powell, William S.

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