

The 1854 Stephen May Letter and Excommunication
Transcribed by Douglas H. Shepard, 2005

To the Baptist Church in Fredonia, of which the undersigned is a Member,
Brethren, Whereas there is a prejudice against me in this Chh. which is believed by some to have its origin in the differences existing between Mr. C. **Roberts** and myself, which I deem untrue, and hope to show, because this prejudice existed more than three years before he was known in this community, which is the sole cause of the offensive document purporting to be a Report of a Committee appointed by the Chh. and read in Chh. meeting by G. W. **Lewis** on the 10th day of Nov. last. Therefore I ask your patience while I trace the events of the past six years which have a bearing on the matter in question.

At the time when efforts were being made for the adjustment of the difficulties between the two bodies claiming to be the first baptist chh. of Pomfret and the formation of a new chh. I was solicited to become a constituent member, and as I had stood aloof from both parties during eight years, and having a strong desire for the prosperity of the baptist interest, I complied with the oft repeated solicitation and became a member— At that time, I regret to say it was obvious there was little union of sentiment and less unanimity of feeling existing between members of the chh. Arminianism Campbellism and soon after Millerism found advocates in the chh. Among them Campbellism was the most prominent which seemed to be fast gaining advocates in the body.

One of the members who openly advocated the Campbellite sentiments had a large number under his tuition at that time as we had no Minister during that year after the first of April. There were a number of candidates for the Pastoral Office, but they were rejected mainly thro' the influence of those adhering to Campbellism. And indeed every opportunity was seized on during the year to poison the minds of the youth with this antichristian doctrine and sentiment by G. W. **Lewis**. Against this as a member of the baptist chh., and a Christian, I deemed it my duty to stand up and bear testimony, having a strong desire for the purity and oneness of the baptist sentiment without which no church can be successful. It was stated repeatedly by the leader of this party that it was not necessary for the church to have a Minister That the New testament was all we needed.

I opposed this sentiment often and referred to the directions given in the Scriptures on this point, and quoted such language as the following. How can they hear without a preacher & which will be recollected by some of the members. I pursued this course during the year on account of which Mr. **Lewis** and his adherents took offence. In the Spring of 1849 Elder **Griswold** took the pastoral charge of the Chh. _____ As a man, a citizen, a christian and a minister, he was universally beloved and respected. The congregation greatly increased in numbers and the chh. was edified. Soon after the settlement of Eld. **Griswold**, one of the members of the chh. Dea. **Hamilton** became a Millerite having embraced all the false doctrine of that deluded sect, and at the first meeting afterwards he avowed and advocated these false sentiments, and said at the same time there could be no objection to his continuing his membership inasmuch as there were members of the chh. who were not Baptists, thereby intimating that our errors justified another. But I opposed his course and was happy to find I was sustained by the Pastor and some of the members of the chh.

This opposition I continued as often as these errors were repeated and sustained by G. W. **Lewis**.

In thus doing what I deemed my duty in opposing error and heresy I laid the foundation for the prejudices against me by Members of the chh. which have been industriously augmented by Campbellite influence. This state of things increased to such a degree that G. W. **Lewis** refused to instance common civility towards me during more than two years. He seemed determined that Dea. **Hamilton** should be retained a member of the chh. and intimated that the greater the diversity of sentiment in the chh. the sooner he could organize a Campbellite Society and build up an interest on the ruins of the Baptist Chh. and this in five years he boasted he would do.

At the close of the first year of Eld. Griswold's services there was a chh. meeting to discuss the subject of continuing him as Pastor of the Chh. ___ G. W. **Lewis** opposed the motion urging as a reason that Eld. **Griswold** was not a grammarian, was ignorant of the Scriptures, and thus incapable of teaching, and that if he were retained he would not give anything towards his support. A subscription was liberally sustained by all with the exception of Mr. **Lewis** and those under his influence, and Eld. **Griswold** continued his pastoral labors during the summer but said the Campbellite influence was against him and paralyzing all his influence and efforts.

About this time the case of Dea. **Hamilton** was bro't before the chh. meeting by D. **Barrell**, nine months had passed since Dea. **Hamilton** had maintained his erroneous sentiments. The chh. had had hopes of his abandoning them, but their hopes were vain. A sharp debate took place between Mr. **Barrell & Lewis**. ___ Mr. **Lewis** alleged that the chh. had no right to exclude one on account of his sentiments. Mr. **Barrell** said that Dea. **Hamilton** was fully established in his views, would make no concession and did not wish to be retained a member of the chh. ___ On the other hand, Mr. **Lewis** insisted that he should be retained a member and seemed very angry, using insolent language and created a great degree of excitement. At this time I confess I was excited in some measure and said there was no difference between Campbellism, Mormonism and Millerism, for they were all disorganizers in everything pertaining to chh. order. ___ This gave great offence to Mr. **Lewis** and his party. He seemed in a great rage and determined to have revenge. Soon after this I requested a chh. meeting to take into consideration his conduct and antichristian sentiments. ___ At four different covenant meetings I made this request, but some of his party opposed it. I therefore each time asked for a letter of dismissal affirming that my sentiments would not justify me in continuing in a chh. where such false views and erroneous practices were sustained, that I wished to be separate from all heresy and false doctrine.

But a deaf ear was turned to all my requests and as Mr. **Lewis** became acquainted with and understood all my objections to him he grew more revengeful. In the spring of 1851 Elder **Kingsbury** assumed the Pastorate charge of the chh. But he had been here but a few months before Mr. **Lewis** commenced an unprovoked attack on him, accusing him of falsehood and lying, but soon found he had commenced on the wrong man. He did not find him the patient inoffensive Eld. **Griswold**. He was met by prompt and energetic decision and he cowered down under the influence of truth.

In the Spring of 1854 I commenced a labour with C. **Roberts**, in accordance with the rule contained in the 18th of Matthew. But he refused to hear me, I then took one more with me but he refused to hear him. I then told it to the chh. and ___ they refused to hear me. I then asked for an unprejudiced committee to investigate my charges against C. **Roberts** together with my conduct towards him and requested at the same time that the investigation should be confined to the difficulty existing between us. All matters of deal had been adjusted between us. All that now existed was in regard to christian conduct towards each other. A Committee was appointed and the first named on that Committee was G. W. **Lewis** who owned he was prejudiced against me and yet was Chairman of that Committee. I knew he was my enemy and the enemy of the chh. and the enemy of the Baptist denomination and yet he was appointed to and accepted the responsible station of carrying out the discipline of the Baptist chh. and he himself not a Baptist and no feelings of interests in common with Baptists. The Committee reported that the labour was not in accordance with the gospel "rule" But they had no evidence words crossed out

I said it was taken in accordance with such rule. But the Committee were not appointed for the purpose of deciding on the merits of the labour that was no part of their business whether the labour was taken in accordance with Gospel rule or not. They transcended their power. As the facts existed they were in duty bound to hear the evidence and make a just report in writing. To hear the amount of evidence introduced on each charge ___ The chh. then would have been enabled to act understandingly. If from the evidence adduced the chh. had come to the conclusion that I had done

wrong I should like a christian [have?] confessed my faults. If there had been an honest and christian course pursued all difficulty might have been amicably adjusted and the church have been in peace and harmony. But the scripture saith not in vain "one sinner destroyeth much good." And he that speaketh as man never spake said "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." It is plain to be seen how much good has been prevented by the influence in the chh. ____ The Report of Committee was accepted and the Committee was discharged. A new Committee of five members was appointed, but for what purpose I was not informed as I was not present at the time. Sometime in July the Chairman of the Committee told me the appointment was made to investigate the difficulties between C. **Roberts** and myself. About the first of September, I met the Committee with Mr. **Roberts**. The charges I had [proposed/prefered?] against him were talked over and as he made no concessions I offered to prove my charges at any time they might appoint. But no time was appointed as they did not wish me to bring any evidence.

Soon after this meeting I called on the chairman of the committee to ascertain when the Committee would be ready for the evidence. His reply was "They do not wish any evidence." From that time I supposed the subject was given up as I heard nothing more about it until the 10th of November. It had been kept a profound secret from me. I did not suppose a report could or would be made without the evidence on both sides and the accuser and the accused were had face to face. It seemed to me they did not act in good faith. It looks like a premeditated plan to deprive me of my rights as it was kept a secret from me and I was not allowed to bring any evidence and no intimation given that a report was being made. About the 8th of Nov. I was informed by the chh. clerk that a chh. meeting was appointed to be held on the tenth of Nov. but did not intimate to me the object or the meeting, I supposed it to be an ordinary business. But greatly to my surprise on that day a report as foreign from the facts in the case as falsehood is from the truth was made. This committee as individuals had made "full inquiries" from the 1st of July until the 10th of Nov. to ascertain whether I was morally or had cheated anybody, but failing to find anything against me, They seized hold of a case which had been adjusted four years before. I allude to the case of Br. J. **Porter**. The case between us was a legal one and was amicably adjusted and in accordance with his own proposition. Hence the inference is plain that this Committee were not governed by the Gospel "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you" but were actuated by prejudice and prepossessian and in opposition to Apostolic injunction "Do nothing by partiality" "Prefer not one above another." But the report is at war with every principle of our holy religion, because it is founded in error partiality and untruth.

The Committee say in their report that they have spared no efforts to obtain a true statement of all the facts bearing on the differences between Bro. **May** and **Roberts**. This is the first count. I ask, is this position true or false? If reflecting offered evidence and obtaining false statements from interested individuals constitute the effort, then this position is true, otherwise it is false. Then the judgment founded on this position must necessarily be false, a true Judgment is founded on true testimony_____ The Committee go on further to say that "having as individuals made full inquiries, find themselves unanimous in the conclusions forced on their minds by their investigations." What investigations had they had? They had rejected offered testimony. They had sought and took ex parti statements.____ In this it is presumed they were "unanimous." But does unanimity in a wrong constitute a right?____ In the 2d count of this report the Committee go on to say "They have made repeated efforts to induce these Brethren mutually to adjust their differences and to settle between themselves but have not been successful ____ But we have had no differences to settle since our arbitration. All matters were then adjusted by three members of the chh. by mutual agreement and Mr. **Roberts** was on the stand one whole day and testified to all the facts relative to himself____ The charges I had previously prefered against Mr. **Roberts** for immoral conduct were not included in our settlement by arbitration. In the third count, the Committee say They are satisfied that Br. **May** made such promises in his letters to Br. **Roberts** and held out such inducements in conversation with him as

led him to believe that it would be greatly for his interest and the interest of his family to leave his former place of residence where he was doing well and remove to Fredonia."

The letters referred to here were before the Arbitrators and passed on by them and the conversations alluded to were testified to by Mr. **Roberts** on the trial. How came this Committee in possession of the conversations between Mr. **Roberts** and myself? If they obtained them of Mr. **Roberts** it could not be received as testimony unless I was present and gave my assent to it. But I was not present on any such occasion. ___ The committee say that "I held out inducements in my letters and conversation for Mr. **Roberts** to leave where he was doing well." Mr. **Roberts** was a hired servant by the year and liable to be turned out of employment at the end of the year. He had no property and had no way to make any. My compassion on the Motherless children when I was there in the Spring of 1850 induced me afterwards to write to him what I had thoughts of doing for the benefit of those children and not him or for his other children. So far from that, I told him plainly I did not design to give him anything. But what I left would be for the benefit of those Motherless children ___ His reply was, he did not expect me to give him any thing.

I also wrote, I had thoughts of purchasing a farm and he might come and live on the farm and we would live together. He should do the work under my direction and we would divide the profits as he would with any other man, so that I could have something to bestow on other needy ones and assist in the education of motherless children ___ I did purchase a farm for \$3500. Team tools, and cows and furnished provisions for his family for more than a year. And what did I receive in return for my expense and labour? Nothing but abuse which I could have shown by ample and competent testimony ___ What I did for him the first year amounted to more than \$600. and so much over and above what I ever thought of doing. I carried out every suggestion that I ever made and arrangement for the benefit of his children. The conduct of Mr. **Roberts** and his Wife was such and their abuse, claiming the exclusive ownership of my property ___ Threatening personal violence and driving me out of my house, was the cause of the arrangements being broken up. Mr. **Roberts** continued on the farm during the next year and the avails of which I received nothing. The Committee go on to say that for more than "one year Br. **May** was satisfied with Br. **Roberts**." ___ Which is not true even for one month ___ "Nor can your committee learn that by any misconduct on the part of Br. **Roberts** or nonfulfillment of his part of the engagement that he has rendered void the positive and repeated obligation which Br. **May** voluntarily entered into with him." This may all be true for they refused to hear the testimony which he freely acknowledged to several persons and which the Committee cannot regard in any other light than as a contract as (binding as) one written and sealed and which could not be violated without involving a great moral wrong." ___ Suffice it here to say that there was no contract made with him of any name or nature and this he testified to before the arbitrators. In the fourth count, the Committee say "They believe Br. **May** has violated his contract and that the work of reconciliation rests with him, and in order to effect which it becomes his duty fully to satisfy Br. **Roberts** for the injuries sustained by him, and to remunerate him for the loss and disadvantage which such violation has caused him to suffer" ___ In answer to this let me here say that inasmuch as there was no contract there was none to violate and that "the work of reconciliation" rests with him and not with me for he and his Wife have been the cause of breaking up the arrangements and making the difficulty. The committee further say that I have deprived him of the use of a good farm worth \$2500." I utterly deny ever having either directly or indirectly made him a promise of a farm or that I ever had the intention or intimated an intention of giving him or his family one dollar of my property while I lived.

It may seem strange to some that the Committee have in their report entirely justified Mr. **Roberts** in all these transactions and yet my charges against him lay before them and proof offered to substantiate those charges. The last item of the Report which I deem worthy of notice is the [suing?] of Bro. J. **Porter**. It is true there was a matter of difference existing between us which was tried in court and settled by mutual agreement, since which there has been no difficulty between us and that was four

years ago. That there has been a great moral wrong connected with these transactions I freely admit. But the wrong rests entirely with Mr. **Roberts** inasmuch as he was the cause of breaking up the arrangements and thereby depriving his children of what I intended to leave them. I think therefore it must be obvious to all that the premises being false the conclusions must be so too. The whole transaction of the committee seems to me to be most extraordinary. _____ Instead of eliciting the truth and correcting errors wherever they may be found, It seems to have been the object of the Committee to find occasion for my removal from the chh. under the impression that I should be formidable in opposing the errors so strenuously maintained by one at least of the members of the Committee. My interest has been identified with the baptist cause for more than fifty years. Believing it to be the cause of God; any innovation raises all the energies of my soul in its defense. I have seen the progress of error for these many years in this place with painful emotions and as opportunity offered I have lifted up my voice against it and for this cause do I now stand before you accused and persecuted. Thus much I deemed it my duty to say in answer to the document purporting to be a report of a committee of the chh. I am aware that in many things I have offended and done wrong, which I regret most sincerely and ask forgiveness _____ But so far as the report of the Committee is concerned it seems to me that it bears on its face the impress of partiality and falsehood.

In closing the remarks I have to offer I desire distinctly to disavow all intention of dictating to the chh. the course it shall pursue, or to ride over the chh. as has been suggested. I have never entertained any such tho't. I think I possess a strong desire for the prosperity of the chh. and would not willingly do anything to retard its progress in the way of holiness and happiness. It must be obvious to all that oneness of mind, unanimity of feeling and concert of action are indispensable to the promotion of peace and good will among Brethren. "One Lord one faith one baptism. I pray that they all may be one" are scriptural injunctions embodying the sentiments I would here set forth. Diversity of sentiment on the fundamental principles of the Gospel, produces disunion discord and strife, confidence is destroyed and how can they strive together for the faith of the gospel? The strife is between themselves. The Holy Spirit is compared to a dove, which will not remain where there is strife and confusion. The scripture saith not in vain "If any man hath not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." Without the Spirit of Christ there is hatred. The Apostle says "whoso hateth his brother is a wanderer and if any man saith he loveth God and hates his brother is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen. " We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the Brethren" _____

In reviewing carefully and prayerfully and often the acts for which I am arraigned before you as a culprit I possess the smiles of an approving conscience. _____ The Apostle Peter saith "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, for if our heart condemn us God is greater than mans heart and knoweth all things. Beloved if our heart condemn us not then have we confidence towards God." No one should presume to judge between God and the conscience of his fellow. If Christ justifies, who dares condemn. The Gospel is our only rule of action, from its teachings I perceive in myself a wide departure as well as in others. I desire and pray that all things may be overruled for the best good of those who trust in him, that his chh. throughout the world may be built up in the faith and order of the Gospel. That this end might be attained The chh. should be purified from all things that disturb its peace and harmony, for as it was anciently so is it now. He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit. Nevertheless what saith the Scriptures. Cast out the bond Woman and her son for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

There are two passages of scripture which I desire read before the chh. now, Which I think appropriate on this occasion. 2d Thess, 2s ch. 3-12. 2d Let. 2d ch. 11-19 I prize above all price the privileges connected with membership in a well refulated chh. It is the only solace left me in my declining years, and yet I would greatly prefer to forego its pleasures and immunities, than connive at

spiritual wickedness in high places. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them." _____ As there is an individual who is a member of the chh. and whose sentiments are not in accordance with the truths of the Gospel and who is not a baptist, I cannot conscientiously remain a member of the chh. unless that individual is severed. I ask then for a letter dismissal.

Stephen May

Read by the Clk in Ch Meeting Dec 12 1854 after which on Mo. D. A. **Woodruff** seconded by H.

A. **Buck**

"Resolved, That in view of the charges sustained against Bro Stephen **May**, and the railing accusations made by him against the Committee of the Church and its members in his written reply to the Report of Committee, this day, read in church meeting at his request, this church withdraw from him the hand of fellowship.