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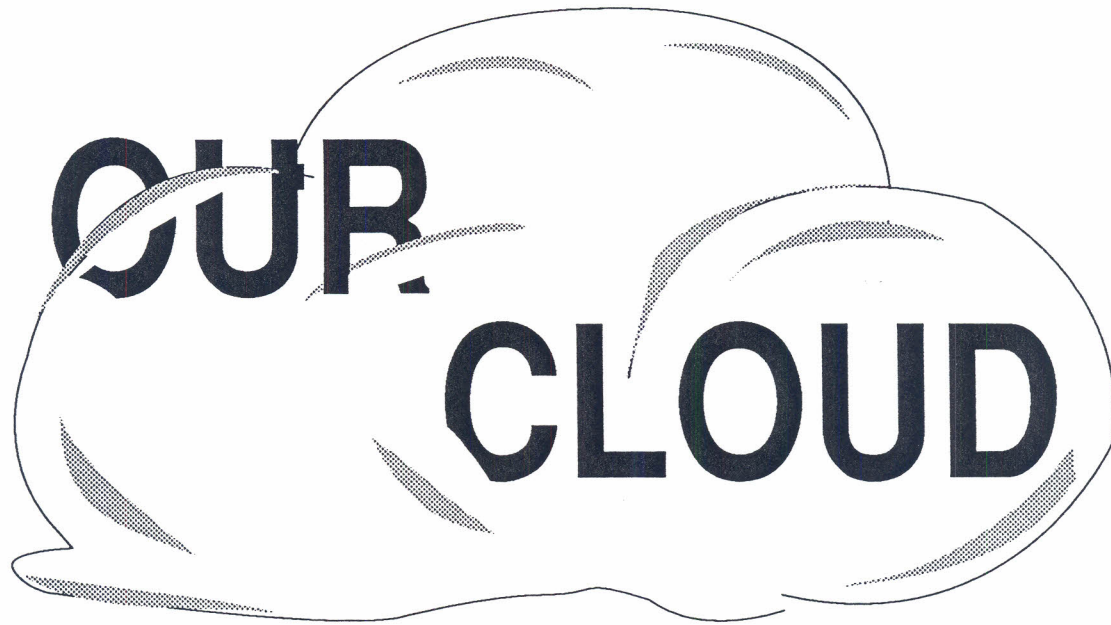


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OF WITNESSES

by Michael Casey

K. C. Moser: A Pathbreaking Preacher

One of the forgotten stories of Restoration history is the courageous story of Kenny Carl Moser who rediscovered and preached the gospel message of peace and grace in a time when it was not fashionable. K. C. Moser was born near Johnson City, Texas on January 23, 1893. He was baptized in 1912 and began preaching in 1917. He spent most of his life preaching in Oklahoma and Texas and gave the last years of his life to teaching at Lubbock Christian College. At the time of his death, February 17, 1976¹, he was seen by some as a revered pioneer and spiritual man, by some as a heretic. Three themes that defined Moser's life and the opinions of others concerning him were spirituality, grace, and peace. These themes are the focus of this brief biographical essay.

Because of a study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Moser began his rediscovery of the Spirit, grace, and spirituality.² Moser wrote in October 1929, "The Spirit of Adoption," defending the doctrine of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Moser encouraged "the brethren" to "welcome this heavenly guest." He argued that "the indwelling Spirit is a present witness testifying as to our present relationship to God and not a past relationship." Moser pointed out some of the positive things that the Spirit does: helping us to pray "when we do not know how to pray (Rom 8:26,27)," crucifying the "lust of the flesh," bringing "forth the fruits of holiness (Gal 5:15-24; Rom 5:5)." For Moser, the Spirit is also "God's stamp of ownership on our hearts and His pledge of our future inheritance (Eph 1:13)." He added, "I am exceedingly afraid of the religion that denies the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the children of God and knows nothing of its witness to the soul that is approved of God."³

Today it is hard to imagine the storm of controversy caused by such beliefs in Moser's day. F. L. Colley responded to Moser's article in February 1930, demanding an explanation. For Colley, the Spirit and the Word were synonymous. "I believe," he wrote, "the Spirit dwells in us, but I do not believe it is a personal direct indwelling."⁴ For Colley and others, the only time the Spirit dwelt in the Christian was when one read the Bible. Moser's position was considered heresy.

What was the source of this curious “Word only” position widespread in the Churches of Christ during Moser’s time? Moser’s own experience provides insight due to the fact that he had previously denied the indwelling of the Spirit. In response to Colley he wrote: “I was brought up at the feet of teachers who denied the indwelling of the Spirit, and for no better reason I denied it too. After I began to study for myself, I soon discovered that no doctrine is more plainly taught than the doctrine of the indwelling of the Spirit in the child of God.”⁵ When Colley continued to press, Moser pointed out that it was “only comparatively recent that anyone has denied the indwelling of the Spirit as I teach it.” McGarvey, Lard and others were examples of Restoration teachers of the same mind as Moser. It was clear to Moser what were the origins of this new doctrine. “Some debaters among us,” he wrote, “who fought an abuse of doctrine in other religious people swung to the opposite extreme and denied the personal indwelling of the Spirit at all.”⁶ These debates grew out of a time when the Churches of Christ competed with the Pentecostals for members. Debates between the two groups were common, and with them arose the increasingly popular idea among Churches of Christ that the Holy Spirit was the “Word only” or the Bible.⁷ Debaters were able to convince many that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer available because the Spirit operated through the Word of God and, in fact, was the Word of God.

Moser’s study of the Holy Spirit led him into more controversy. Later, in a reply to Colley, Moser wrote:

Logically, those who deny the indwelling of the Holy Spirit leave grace for law, and would exchange the safety under Christ for the wretched condition described in Romans the seventh chapter . . . I see a more fundamental trouble than a failure to believe in the indwelling of the Spirit. Legalism is the father of the denial of the personal indwelling of the Spirit. It is the rule that those who deny the indwelling of the Spirit conceive of Christianity as one law superceding another, and teach that salvation is upon the principle of works. The indwelling of the spirit has no place under law, but it naturally belongs to grace, a spiritual religion. God is Spirit; under Christ the birth is spiritual; our citizenship is spiritual; circumcision is spiritual; the priesthood is spiritual; our sacrifice is spiritual; our virtues are

produced by the Spirit. We are sons under grace — not under law.⁸

In 1932 Moser expanded these themes in his book **The Way of Salvation**. This book emphasized the way of grace as opposed to legalism.

Moser identified part of the problem in understanding grace with the traditional explanation of the gospel in the churches of Christ. He argued that the “plan of salvation” produced a “crude legalism” and a “degenerate Christianity.” This “plan” separated “repentance, faith, confession, and baptism” and “assigned each a separate and distinct office . . .” This created the false notion “as that faith starts one on his way to Christ, gets him so far and stops, then turns him over to repentance.” Repentance, then, “takes him up and gets him still nearer Christ, but stops short him.” The process continues until “baptism is reached, which puts one ‘into Christ.’”⁹

In 1934 he wrote another article in the **Firm Foundation**, “Can the Gospel be Obeyed?” where he continued his critique of certain traditional ideas. Most in the Restoration tradition argued that the bible consisted of a compendium of “facts” to be believed and “commands” to be obeyed. The Bible was seen as a giant jigsaw puzzle and the “facts” had to be arranged in the correct manner. One prime example of the correct ways to organize the “facts” and “commands” of the scripture was the five step delineation in the “plan of salvation.” Moser rejected this approach to the Bible and salvation:

The gospel does not consist in the detached facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is not simply facts about Jesus. the good news of salvation is Jesus crucified for our sins, buried and raised for our justification. The gospel consists in a person in whom to trust, not simply in one command to be obeyed. Commands are not the gospel The gospel concerns a person and not mere facts. The gospel is appropriated by obedience to commands, and as a result of obedience to the gospel we enjoy the promises of God.¹⁰

For Moser the “steps” to salvation were not isolated “commands” or “actions” separate and apart, but they occurred together and were inseparable: “Therefore to believe the gospel is to obey the gospel. To believe the gospel is to obey the gospel. To believe the gospel is to believe in, trust in, Christ crucified, buried and raised for our justification.”¹¹

Moser's notoriety stemmed from his ability to speak courageously and persuasively on subjects outside of the mainstream of his tradition. In addition to his positions on the Spirit and grace, Moser's prophetic voice could be heard on the subject of peace. In the early 1920's, after most in the Churches of Christ had rejected pacifism,¹² Moser wrote:

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Now, if the spirit of war is not the spirit of Christ, then a Christian cannot engage in war. But what is the Spirit of Christ? "But the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness," etc. (Gal 5:22) The spirit of war is the spirit of hatred and confusion. Therefore the Spirit of Christ is not the spirit of war, unless love is hatred.¹³

A few weeks later, Moser again pressed the issue. He wrote: "Christians are too slow to take advantage of the opportunity now afforded them to speak out on the subject of disarmament." He thought they "should manifest a greater interest in the disarmament of nations than others." Moser argued that disarmament was important for "preserving peace": "It takes no logician to see the connection between preparedness and war." Even if an appeal to disarmament did not work, "it would at least postpone them and thereby give time for serious thought that might lead to arbitration. In addition disarmament was needed

because:

Billions of dollars are spent yearly for the construction of battleships that become obsolete within ten years or less time. Taxes are high and going higher because of the mad rivalry between the nations to excel each other in the building of navies. Past war debts and expenditures for future wars are sapping the very life of nations. No prosperity can finally endure it.¹⁴

He concluded in typical Moser fashion: "Let disarmament be talked in the schools, proclaimed from the pulpit, championed by the press, 'till nations beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more.'¹⁵

Moser's beliefs, whether on salvation or war and peace, were Christ centered and put him ahead of his time and outside the mainstream of the Churches of Christ until the 1960's. Books like **The Way of Salvation** and **The Gist of Romans** have changed perspectives and lives.¹⁶ Virtually black-listed in the 1940's and 50's, by the early 1960's and 1970's Moser began to be invited to speak at lectureships again. He also became a popular speaker and teacher at Campus Evangelism Seminars, World Missions Workshops, and other evangelical renewal meetings in the church. Today his ideas would hardly cause a ripple and that stands as a testimony to the courage of his convictions.