

Fort Payne church of Christ



The Weekly Moment

A Weekly Motivational Message

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

Tolbert Fanning 1810-1874



Tolbert Fanning was born in Cannon County, Tennessee on May 10, 1810. He was the son of William and Nancy Bromley Fanning. Not much is known of his early years, but in about 1818 the family moved to Lauderdale County, in Alabama's most northwest section. There, he attended a school on Cypress Creek, operated by Ross Houston, the brother of Alabama Governor George S. Houston (1808-1879). By 1824, the Christian movement was established on the creek, with James E. Matthews and Ephraim D. Moore leading the group.

In the fall of 1826, a young preacher by the name of B.F. Hall came into the region teaching a doctrine of salvation, different to what they had been preaching. He taught that the gospel must be obeyed, and that when they were baptized, they would be relieved of the guilt of their sins. While preaching one night, the sixteen-year-old Tolbert Fanning responded to the invitation. The following morning, October 1st, James Matthews baptized him for the forgiveness of his sins in Cypress Creek.

Within three years, Tolbert Fanning was preaching occasionally in different locations. He was passionate about his beliefs and was greatly desirous of opportunities to share the gospel. On one occasion early in his ministry, he was in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where he witnessed a brother selling one of his black slaves, who was also a Christian. Fanning had, early in life, been convinced that the institution of slavery was ungodly. The following day, he preached at the East Main St. church of Christ on the ungodly practice of slavery in America. His preaching was met with great anger by most of the church. It was agreed that Tolbert Fanning would never preach for that church again. The year was 1830; thirty-one years before the country would be embroiled in civil war over the issue.

The following year, he had his first debate in Nashville, Tennessee with the local Presbyterian minister, Obadiah Jennings. Jennings had debated Alexander Campbell a couple of years earlier. The subject was on baptism.

Fanning moved to Nashville in January of 1832, where he entered the University of Nashville, in search of a law degree. The following summer, he went to Kentucky, and traveled with Alexander Campbell through the state, preaching and evangelizing. He graduated at the end of the school year, 1835. During the summer, he traveled through Kentucky again with Alexander Campbell. In the fall, he married Sarah Shreve of Nicholasville, Kentucky. They were married, but three days later she was overcome with a fatal illness. Twelve days later, she went to be with the Lord. Though deeply grieved, he continued to preach throughout the region. The following year, he married English born, Charlotte Fall. As a side note, she was the sister of Philip S. Fall, a gospel preacher who, preaching for the Baptist Church in Nashville in the mid-1820s, converted the whole congregation to New Testament Christianity, and thus organized the church of Christ in that city. Tolbert was twenty-six and Charlotte was twenty-seven when they were married.

With the marriage of Tolbert and Charlotte Fanning, education of young people quickly became their life's greatest passions. Between 1837 and 1839, they conducted a female academy in Franklin, Tennessee. Later, in 1840, they moved to Elm Crag, in southeast Nashville, (the property is now the location of the international airport). Immediately, they opened another female academy that continued for another two years. In 1843, they expanded their operations to include a boys' agricultural school that continued for two years. The school was unique, in that the students earned their education through daily working a farm.

Perhaps, the Fannings are best known for establishing Franklin College. Beginning in January 1845, this college was where men like William and David Lipscomb, Elisha G. Sewell, and T.B. Larimore received their training. The school continued until the beginning of the Civil War, when all the students left to join the Confederate Army. The school resumed in the fall of 1865, only to have the main building burn to the ground a few weeks into the term. Providentially, a girls' college that existed just a few hundred yards from Franklin College was purchased. The school became known as Hope Institute. Franklin College began conducting classes at Hope Institute and continued several years.

In addition to being an educator, Tolbert Fanning was a writer. He enjoyed a wide range of research, and it translated into writing in a number of different fields of interest. His interest in farming and raising cattle led him to edit a paper called the ***Agriculturalist*** from 1840-1845. It served as the official journal of the Tennessee state agricultural association. He also edited a religious paper called the ***Christian Review*** from 1844-1847. However, the magazine he is best known for is a paper he began in 1855 called the ***Gospel Advocate***. Other than a few years during the Civil War, the paper has continued for over 150 years, and perhaps has been the single greatest influence in the churches of Christ in the southern United States. Subsequent editors of the magazine involve a veritable who's who in restoration history, some of which were David Lipscomb, H. Leo Boles, B.C. Goodpasture, Guy N. Woods, F. Furman Kearley and Neil Anderson. Today, the magazine continues under the editorship of Greg Tidwell, and the paper is still a strong voice for Scriptural soundness. Everyone should subscribe to and read the ***Gospel Advocate***.

In the spring of 1874, Fanning suffered an accident when a prize bull gored the six-foot, six-inch farmer/preacher. He was immediately put to bed. After a week or two, he began to get out of bed and walk around the property again. During one walk, he over-exerted himself, feeling a tear inside. He went back to bed, never to rise again. The following Sunday morning, May 3rd, at 11:30 am, he passed away. Today his remains lie in the family plot in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville. Only eternity will reveal the great good that has been done for the cause of Christ by Tolbert and Charlotte Fanning.

Source: <https://www.therestorationmovement.com/>

Think about it.

Here's hoping you'll make the "most of your minutes" this week.

Hope to see you at Bible Study *soon!*

In Christian Love,

Bob Strickland