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BAPTISTS AND UNITY

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(1862–1947)

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**How Far Shall Baptists Co-operate  
with other Evangelical Denominations?**

The question of Union is in the air and it is going to be advocated with great vigor and ingenuity for a long time. Baptists cannot ignore it and we ought not try to do so. The fact is that many religious denominations have no excuse for their separate existence other than pure sectarianism. The different Presbyterian churches ought to unite. The only reason they do not is sectarian narrowness. This is equally true of the different Methodist churches. If those pedobaptists who are so urgently pleading for a general Union would manage to induce their churches that are located within the limits of a few blocks in our cities, to get together, they would render the world a service and show the grace of consistency. It is hard for us Baptists to patiently hear what they say, while what they do thunders so loudly in our ears. As for the YMCA, it has done much to promote unionism but it will probably have enough to do for the next few years explaining away the testimony of the soldiers returning from France, if what Judge Ben B. Lindsay says in the *March Cosmopolitan* is true.

Still the day of greater co-operation surely has come, never to pass, and our people must do some earnest, just, and straight forward thinking on the subject, if we are to avoid the evils of narrowness on the one hand and of disintegration on the other.

In answering this question there are some fundamental considerations which should govern us. One of them is this: The teaching of the Old and New Testaments makes one body of doctrine, all of which is essential to the well being of humanity, both individually and socially, in this life and in the life to come.

It will never be possible for the prayer of our Savior, that His people may be one, to be answered, as long as the teaching of the Bible is looked upon as being composite and justifying one sect emphasizing one part and another sect another part. It is one body of truth, and Paul could sincerely write: "I beseech you brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye all be perfected together in the same mind and in the same

judgment" (1 Cor 1:10). This is the true basis of co-operation. The governments of the world are not going to be perfected in ruling the people so as to insure universal peace and promote universal prosperity, happiness and liberty, so long as they eye each other as antagonists. There must be co-operation. It is not possible to have one world-wide nation but it is possible to have a world-wide co-operation of those nations which have similar political ideals and the same beneficent purpose for mankind. There cannot be one worldwide church which will not be oppressive. There can be world-wide co-operation between churches which agree on the essential doctrines of Christianity and have the same form of organization. Others may co-operate to an extent, but their co-operation must be limited always and everywhere to the narrow sphere of social endeavor.

There can be no permanent or efficient federation of incompatibles. A league between Australia and Turkey would not get anywhere. If you should try to mix German imperialism with U.S. democracy you would have an explosion. To undertake such leagues or federations would be madness. It is the same way with churches. Spiritual regeneration will not mix with formalism; the doctrine of ordinance-salvation will not mix with salvation by grace; Episcopal absolutism will not mix with Baptist democracy.

What ought to be done? All earnest statesmen ought to diligently search for those natural laws of society upon which all governments should be founded and conform their theories of statesmanship and the forms of their governments to those laws, until they go far enough towards that which is fundamentally just and right to clasp each other's hands. This holds good in religion and the dictum is the word of God. It ought to be easy for religious bodies to discover the truth therein and conform to it. Any other sort of union must necessarily be either neutralizing to spiritual forces or explosive.

All the truth must be emphasized instead of ignoring part of it. Just as soon as a religious denomination ignores important truth somebody will rise up, call attention to it and gather a people who will make it an essential part of their creed. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

From this it follows that Baptists should not only refuse to unite with those who ignore part of the Word of God but we should not co-operate in any movement which tends to cause people to ignore it. We should stand for all of it, all the time, everywhere. The King of Judah began by cutting out parts with a pen-knife; but after that he burned the whole book (Jer 36:23-25). Baptists must not help in a similar crime.

This is a day when social service is being preached as never before. Never have the by-products of the gospel been appreciated as they are now. The second great commandment (Matt 22:39) has come in for consideration. Some are emphasizing it out of all proportion and making it eclipse the first commandment of all (Matt 22:37). Judge Ben B. Lindsay, in the article above referred to, does this to an extent which makes us wonder if he ever had any adequate conception of, much less personal experience with, divine grace. Baptists cannot afford to co-operate with any movement by anybody which does not acknowledge and make paramount personal regeneration as the basis of all Christian activity. The moment any group of associates with us insists on minifying personal regeneration, we must feel conscience bound to withdraw, for without such regeneration social order will never be permanently established nor will individuals escape going to hell.

Let it never be forgotten by Baptists that he who preaches either of the two great commandments without the other is fatally wrong. Especially is he wrong who magnifies the second and ignores the first. Baptists must not become expert socialists and cease to preach individual repentance and pardon, regeneration and sanctification. Baptists can not co-operate in any movement which ignores personal regeneration for any other consideration whatever, no matter how important. Without the new birth, and the love of the Father being shed abroad in the heart, there is no religion worth our consideration for a moment.

Second, churches should exist for the purpose of impressing upon people's minds the teaching of the Bible and bringing them in character, thinking and conduct into harmony with the revealed will of God.

Jesus Christ was not a mere reformer. The churches of New Testament times did not engage in political campaigns or try to reconstruct society by human means or socialistic propaganda. They went far deeper to get social results. They taught proper personal relation to God and relied on the aggregate conduct of regenerated units to reform society.

Baptists should not co-operate in meetings or movements where the people are led, in the name of Christ, to rely on other powers apart from the grace of God to reform either the individual or the masses. The success of such movements is pitiful failure in the end. As citizens, or educators, or reformers we may avail ourselves of every social and educational force to uplift the world, but let it always be remembered that the church is religious in its purpose and exists to bring men into harmony with the will of God. Baptist churches should stay close to their main purpose and not co-operate in any movement which, if successful, would destroy themselves by blotting out of people's minds a clear understanding of the great mission of churches of Christ. We Baptists are under no obligation either to mislead

the world concerning our mission or to destroy our churches. In the field of entertainment we have learned, long ago, that other things can beat the church, and the same will be found true when we go into other side-lines.

Third, since there is power in co-operation for the accomplishment of any human endeavor to the degree that it approaches unanimity and complete efficiency, there should be the utmost co-operation among Christian people in those things which are in harmony with the Word of God.

Baptists should be good citizens of every nation in which they may reside. None should go beyond us in upholding our government in all its efforts which are in harmony with our understanding of our duty to God.

The Bible teaches sobriety and we may, therefore, join with others in endeavors to prohibit the sale and use of intoxicants. The Bible commands personal purity, hence we should assist in every effort at the suppression of vice. These duties devolve upon us as individuals. We do them not merely as church members but as lovers of righteousness. We should stand ready every hour to join with anybody to promote them.

However, our churches should be careful not to enter into embarrassing agreements. We should look carefully into the leadership where we go in with others. It should be understood by everybody that Baptists are free and that no agreements entered into by Pastors' Associations can bind Baptist churches. When a Baptist pastor enters into such an agreement with others, he binds only one man—himself. He may induce others to join him but his power is only that of moral suasion. Both pastors and churches should not forget the fact that Baptist churches as such are not to be bound, or held responsible, by such agreements among a group of pastors of several denominations. The same is true of agreements by deacons of our churches. No body of men have a right to bind us and we have a right to withdraw from co-operation at any time our judgments or consciences dictate.

Our co-operation is based on these principles. Our churches should abide by them. We must be true to God first. We should seek His approval always in everything we do. He surely cannot approve that which is contrary to His revealed word. Regardless of any human consideration of friendship or hatred, approval or persecution, assistance or opposition, we must be loyal and true to our Master. As far as is consistent with such loyalty we ought to give the utmost co-operation to every person or group of persons who works in any way for the betterment of the world.