

Baptists and Interdenominationalism

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Dr. Ernest Pickering of Minneapolis, Minnesota said: "For hundreds of years Baptists had no problem regarding their relationship to other denominations. They were a persecuted, hunted people, fleeing from the power of tyrannical religion. Ancient Baptists carried the banner of gospel truth even through the period of the Dark Ages, meeting secretly, but evangelizing with remarkable success.

"Since the rise of post-Reformation denominationalism, Baptists have been faced with the problem of their relationship to other denominational groups. In the last fifty to seventy-five years the problem of interdenominational movements has been accentuated for fundamental Baptists in the United States. The growth of fundamental interdenominationalism has been notable during this period and has produced a flood of mission boards, radio programs, schools and other agencies. Its influence has extended into Baptist churches and affected the thinking of Baptist people. The spirit of the day is the spirit of 'togetherness,' a spirit which declares 'Let us forget our differences so that we may all work together.'

"The spirit of interdenominationalism is a pervasive one. It must be viewed in the light of Scriptural principles, those to which Biblical Baptists adhere.

"To deny the great good which some interdenominational organizations have accomplished would be to deny obvious facts. Neither would anyone question the personal godliness of many interdenominationalists. But these matters are beside the point. The basic issue is this: Are the concepts, principles, and methods of contemporary, fundamental interdenominationalism true to the teachings of the Word of God? Are they compatible with the Baptist position which rests upon these teachings? A comparison of interdenominationalism with historic Baptist principles will serve to answer this question."

The question then is, are Baptists of today ready to do what they consistently have refused to do in the past. If so, were they wrong?

As I look at the subject, we are not discussing all denominations and their relationships with other denominations but only Baptists and other denominations. Just what is our relationship as Baptists with other denominations?

Our relationships can be divided into four basic areas which can be seen in three concentric circles, each of which has its own area of fellowship, with some partial overlapping [See chart].

The largest area of fellowship is that which we have as individuals with all people living on earth. We have a family relationship in that we all belong to the human race having descended

from a common pair, Adam and Eve. This includes those who are the non-religious, either atheists or agnostics, the false religions such as the Hindoos, the Muslims, etc., as well as the false cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, etc. This relationship however is strictly limited.

Then within the first circle or the outer circle are included those Christians who are of other Christian denominations. There is an area of fellowship with these which is much greater than those outside the circle since we are all members of the family of God, having been born again.

It is in this circle that the pastor's position and work may bring him into contact with ministers of other denominations in the community, and his comfort and usefulness will to some extent depend on the esteem and confidence with which he is regarded by those Christians outside his own church. He will often times find many of the noblest Christian men and women in these other denominations and it is well to maintain with them the most frank and cordial relations. This is especially true when called upon to cooperate in a funeral service.

He should be ready to show a friendly, cordial spirit and a readiness to help in all areas that does not compromise his basic Baptist doctrines, principles or practices. This however should never extend to an exchange of pulpits or cooperation in either union, ecumenical or citywide campaigns or revival meetings. In such meetings each church is expected to waive its distinctive doctrines, something which Baptists cannot do. While it is not denied that such meetings have sometimes produced some good and possibly beneficial results, still they are not desirable, for what benefits might be derived are more than off-set by the loss of the church's distinctiveness as a Baptist church differing from other denominations. To do so places one in the position of being "just another Protestant denomination." Thus, this circle of fellowship is of necessity a very restricted circle.

The second circle of fellowship is within the outer circle and this includes members of other Baptist churches, yet not members of the church to which we are members. Since they have been scripturally baptized and are members of Baptist churches, there is an area of fellowship greater than that which we have with other Christians who have not been scripturally baptized. Cooperation with these churches in mission work, education, revivals, etc. is not only advisable but we see particular examples of such cooperation in the Scriptures as various churches cooperated together in both the support of the persecuted church in Jerusalem and the support of a missionary, the Apostle Paul. This cooperation was done on an individual church basis, for though the churches associated together in their cooperation, they did not form an Association, Convention or organization of any kind as each of the churches maintained their status as an independent Baptist church.

The inner circle and the one where we should have our greatest fellowship is that circle which includes those who are members of the same church to which we belong. It is this small inner circle where we should have our greatest fellowship.

The difficulty we often have is in determining the boundary lines or limits of these areas of fellowship for they are not the same, and it is to this difficult question that we will be seeking an answer in this book.

Very few articles or books have been written on this subject, for few if any modern day writers discuss this subject at all and if so, it is for the purpose of erasing or removing these circles in order to make just one big circle of fellowship, eliminating all areas of division. As an example I quote the following:

Dr. Jack Van Impe, noted evangelist in America today, has published an article entitled "That They All May Be One." This article is published in the 1st Quarter, 1983 of *American*

Review. It is a very lengthy article, precluding my quoting the entire article, but I do want to quote some excerpts in order that we might set the background for our discussion of "Baptists and Interdenominationalism."

Dr. Van Impe says: "The Lord Jesus, in His high priestly prayer, said, '[Father], as thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. Neither pray I for these alone [my sent ones], but for them also which shall believe on me [converts of future generations] through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (John 17:18, 20, 21).

"The unity or oneness of the family of God is the purpose of the Lord's prayer. Imagine, God in the flesh prayed that all Christians in all eras of time might have love for one another as a sign that the Father really sent the Son and that Christianity is genuine. Is it any wonder that Jesus said in John 13:35: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

"1 Corinthians 12:13 declares: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.' This is not a Baptist, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Wesleyan Methodist, Christian and Missionary Alliance or Evangelist Free Church body. Rather, it is the body of Jesus Christ composed of all born-again believers found in numerous denominations. . . It's too bad that God, who chose us and called us to salvation (Ephesians 1:4) did not do it through one denomination. This would have made unity much simpler (ha!). . . Do you really think that denominational tags are that important to God? . . .

"Don't misunderstand. We may each have our personal convictions and hold to our doctrinal distinctives. I do, as a Baptist. Still, should we shun other brothers in Christ who disagree with our position? Could it be that most of us follow at least one man-made teaching within each of our denominations that could prove to be wrong, and scorn all brothers who disagree with us? Remember that no man is right on every issue, be he Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Wesley or the leader upon whom your denomination was founded or for whom it is named. . .

"Dr. Paul E. Billheimer states: 'I believe personally that the main thing hindering the return of the Lord is the disunity of the Body. This is the greatest sin in the Church because it is the real cause of more souls being lost than any other sin.' . . .

"Am I being condemnatory? By no means. In fact, I, too, was guilty. In my mass, area-wide crusades, dating from 1969 to 1980, many good brothers in Christ were barred from participation because I allowed 'militant' leaders in numerous cities to establish false standards of separation. Consequently, men who dearly loved God were often banned because they did not bear the same denominational tag . . . As a result, many good men were deeply hurt. Yet, I remained silent.

"During the last five years, my spirit grew progressively troubled and many decisions were made. Consequently, I am now able to fulfill the promise I made at the 1977 Sword of the Lord Conference in Detroit. At that time I stated: 'I can no longer tolerate the dissension and division occurring among the brethren. It hinders genuine revival and makes a mocking world reject the message of Christ. I will no longer go into areas for future evangelistic campaigns unless there is a new spirit of love and unity among our leaders.'

"I have lived with this heartache long enough. Now it is finished, and my only desire is to love all the family of God and proclaim the message of reconciliation until I go home. How else can I expect to hear my Lord says, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant?'

"Because the situation concerning my area-wide crusades became seemingly hopeless, I realized the futility of attempting to reach a world of lost men under these heartbreaking

conditions. Thus, I ended this aspect of my ministry, fulfilling my promise made at the Sword of the Lord Conference in 1977. . .

"Beloved brothers in Christ, I reach out to you with open arms of love. If you were ostracized and banned from my crusades, I apologize. I also ask forgiveness for injuring you—a true member of the body of Christ. I promise both my God and you that the rest of my years will be spent proclaiming the message of reconciliation and love for *all* the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). I cannot do otherwise, for we are all one body in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 12:13), and the Holy Spirit adds in verses 25 and 26 that 'there should be no schism [or division] in the body' because it inflicts agonizing pain upon all of us...

"Brothers and sisters, since I have caused some of this pain in the body of Christ, I ask once again for your forgiveness. I truly love each of you who are members of the family of God, and never want to knowingly hurt anyone again.

"May I conclude by asking all ministers and laymen the following question: 'When did you last exemplify the love of Christ to a brother or sister within another denomination—or even with your own if they are of another association or affiliation?' If not, why not? Since we are all members of the one body, are we not 'fingers on the same hand' as it were?

"What a shame, then, that religious leaders will not allow these fingers—representing various denominational brothers—to touch one another until we reach heaven's golden shores! God forgive all of us. We have been wrong. . .so drastically wrong. . .so scripturally wrong!

"Show love to manifest to an unbelieving world that we all *are* one, and that the Father *hath* sent the Son!"

There is no doubt in my mind that this is a part of the "falling away" of the last days predicted by the Apostle Paul. Paul said the "time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3).

It has often times been demanded of Baptists that they show evidence of a church before the Day of Pentecost, and strangely enough, many Baptists are willing to concede that there was no church before Pentecost. However, an honest inquirer can find evidence of a church before Pentecost if he will simply examine the inspired record without any preconceived bias against finding such a church.

John the Baptist was sent in order to prepare a people for the Lord, and when the Lord arrived to begin His public ministry, the Lord accepted these people and called them His disciples. Within this group or body of disciples, under the authority of Christ and giving obedience to His authority, we find everything necessary for a New Testament church. They are called out from the world by a profession of faith and baptism, they are associated in a visible body according to the direction of Christ their only Head and Kin, and they submit all things to His authority. This was the beginning of Christ's church and John himself applied to it the very name given it in the book of Revelation, the Bride (Rev. 21:9), for this church will one day be the Lamb's wife.

Shortly thereafter Christ gave to this body of disciples the name church or assembly, a body that could and frequently did assemble for worship and the transaction of business. He assembled this group several times before He gave them the title of His church or assembly.

The first full church meeting in which all the disciples were gathered together in one place for instruction is recorded by Matthew in chapter 5 verse 1: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him." These disciples were not the twelve apostles nor the seventy mentioned later on, for they had not yet been

chosen. This was the entire multitude of His disciples, no doubt those who had been baptized by John the Baptist.

This is the first recorded meeting of the church, a visible assembly of men, possessing certain qualifications, called out from the multitudes for a specific purpose, and this is the essential meaning of the word *ecclesia*. We can even add an organized assembly since they recognized the supreme authority of Christ over them.

In this first general meeting of His disciples, which He soon named His *ecclesia* or church, He instructed them touching their individual Christian duties, and clearly indicated their mission as His assembly by giving them their first commission. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid . . . let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Through this commission Christ revealed to His church that they were His missionary agency to take the gospel to the whole world for that light was to be taken to the whole world.

Here was this first church of which Christ was the living present Head and the source of all law and government, but as yet it had no officers since neither the apostles nor the seventy had been chosen as yet.

We read of a second meeting recorded by Luke in which He called them together (Luke 6:12). At this meeting He chose the Apostles and then in Luke 10 He appoints the seventy. It was shortly after this that He announced to this body of disciples that they were His church (Matthew 16:18). Next He delivers to His church the laws dealing with personal offenses among the members which is still in force today, and the giving of this law and the specific mention of the body of His disciples as a church, puts it beyond all question that there was an organization at this time, since laws imply and necessitate an organization.

The third general meeting of His church was after His resurrection, where at a place He appointed before His death, He met more than five hundred brethren at one time (1 Cor. 15:6).

We are not told how many witnessed His ascension, but at least 120 upon their return held a church meeting in an upper room in Jerusalem where they by popular vote, elected Mathias to take the place left vacant by the death of Judas. This was a valid election as attested to by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:15-26; 2:14; 6:1-2).

This assembly which Christ had assembled these three times and which He had designated as His church, the Holy Spirit calls a church after the ascension of Christ. There is not the slightest indication that there was the least modification made in its organization, much less a new and unheard of organization was originated by the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. It was to this body that Christ left, were added the three thousand souls on the Day of Pentecost and it was to that church already existing that were added daily for some time after Pentecost. No church was organized during the days of Pentecost or afterward in the city of Jerusalem.

Having seen that the Lord and His apostles foretold the fact of the falling away of the church (2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:3), let us consider more particularly the origin and nature of that falling away. But this cannot be rightly understood unless we have a true conception of that standing or condition from which the church fell. We must, therefore, enter into some particulars as to the ends which God purposed to accomplish by it, so far as He had made them known, and how those ends were to be attained.

The church is established by God for a special purpose, the revelation of Himself and His will to the world. He chooses some individuals to be His instruments of instruction and blessing to others. This He did through individuals, as with the patriarchs, or in the case of the Jews, through a nation. They were separated by His act from other nations, and brought into a special covenant relation to Him. The New Testament church constitutes a new election, wholly distinct from that of the Jews.

The church may fail partially to fulfill the purpose for which God chose it, even as it was with the Jews (Isa. 1:2; 5:2), but His purpose in it cannot fail. It is not preserved from all falling away, but cannot become wholly apostate (Mt. 16:18; 28:18-20). It is preserved by the Headship of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:22).

As the human body is that through which a man acts upon things without, so it is with Christ's body. The Head, personally or through the Holy Spirit, made known who should officially serve under Him, and teach and rule His people; and thus unity of doctrine and of administration was preserved in His selecting the Apostles as inspired teachers and providing us with an inerrant and infallible Bible as our standard for all things. Following the beginning of that first church by the Lord, other churches were formed and each congregation chose their own pastor by vote or election by the membership, the membership being guided by the Holy Spirit. But when a church loses their "first love," it can come into such a spiritual condition of estrangement from its Head, that they are no longer able to discern the choice of its Head, and the church then drifts away from following its Head to following another. This is the beginning of disobedience resulting in disobedience to the Lord's authority where He said "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

The church as the body of Christ is one with Him. The law of His life is the law of its life and it is in full sympathy with Him, His truth is its truth, His purposes its purposes, His strength its strength. It loves and hates what He loves and hates.

The Head has a twofold work: first *in* the church to fill it with His life; and secondly, *through* the church to manifest Himself to the world. The church therefore is His body through which He can act and manifest Himself to the world. How well He is able to manifest Himself to the world is affected by the spiritual condition of the church. As He has no will separate from the Father's will, so the church should have no will separate from His will. The Lord said "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30), so the church of its ownself can do nothing. It has no independent activity, for it is the Head who teaches and acts through the body, His church. It is Christ who acts by His pastors and leads the worship of the church.

The falling away mentioned by Paul is the change in the churches relationship to her Head. The Head can no longer carry on His perfect work in it and by it as in the past. The vital link is not broken, but it has become weakened so that it no longer functions as a strong, vibrant body as it once did. There may be individual members with much zeal and activity, but the action of the church as a whole has been basically ineffective. The cause of this change is seen in Revelation 2:4 "Thou hast left thy first love." This was the first step that ended in the condition of the church of Laodicea with Christ, the Head of the church, on the outside seeking admittance to His own church.

The church of Ephesus left her "first love" and failed to do her "first works." In these "Seven Churches of Asia" we see a deterioration until we arrive with the church of Laodicea which not only had left her "first love" but we see her Head is on the outside threatening to completely leave her.

Within the church may be "withered branches" who no longer have life since they have separated themselves from the Head. In fact, it is possible for the members of a church to so separate themselves that the whole body may become spiritually weak or enfeebled and so fail to accomplish His purpose for them. When enough of the members reach that point, the church is in danger of the Head leaving and the church soon dies. It may continue as an organization but there will be no life in it. It has even exceeded or surpassed the state of the church of Laodicea.

The Lord makes known to the church her own spiritual condition as seen by the Head. The estimate the church has of herself however, may be very different than that of her Lord as

seen by the seven churches of Asia, particularly the church of Laodicea. Such ignorance of her real spiritual condition is possible because she has lost her first love and does not have that intimate fellowship with her Lord that enables her to receive the communication from her Lord or they reject His evaluation in preference to their own. They no longer have "ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The church is an organization but it is far more than an organization. It is also an organism. It is alive. It is a living organization with the life of its Head pulsating through its very being. But when the church is cut off by its Head, it may continue to be an organization but it no longer is an organism—it is dead. This was the warning which the Lord gave to the church of Laodicea. Separated from its Head, the church would cease to be an organism and be only an organization.

As her strength was in union with Him, so her weakness was in disunion. Failing then to have their strength from Him, they then turned to the strength of numbers and men by merging under a Bishop over several churches, and ultimately to the leadership of one man, the Pope.

There was no uniformity in the early stages of the Catholic Church even as there is no uniformity in Protestantism today. The Roman Catholic Church began very similar to Protestantism—separate denominations, each gathered around particular doctrines or men, yet soon to be gathered around one supreme authority, a church council, later to be around one man—the Pope.

Some of these "denominations" within the Roman Catholic church continue today under the descriptive title of "orders." The Jesuits, the Franciscans, Carmelites, Dominicans and many others. Though each of them is a member of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, there are as many differences between them as there are between the various denominations of Protestantism.

As early as the second century in the writings of Irenaeus, we see that the emphasis is no longer upon the churches but rather on the church. In seeking to unify these various churches, he wrote that it would be preserved in three ways: by adherence to scripture, the apostolic tradition, and the historic episcopate or the miniature hierarchy which had already begun.

Cyprian carried it still further for where the bishop is, for Cyprian, there is the church. And he said "he who will not have the church for his mother cannot have God for his father." The aggregate of bishops thus became for Cyprian the concrete realization in time and space of the universal visible church. Greenslade has summarized Cyprian's views thusly: "The church is a single, visible body, using the apostolic Scriptures in addition to the Old Testament, maintaining the traditional apostolic faith, living under the institutions which have been handed down from apostolic times; and it is further linked with the apostles by the succession of bishops in each see." In Cyprian's teachings were present most of the basic concepts which were to convert Christianity into a persecuting religion. The sword became not only an accepted method of preserving unity of the church but a tool of evangelism as well.

Cyprian's united church fell apart around 1054 because of the split between what is referred to as Eastern and Western Christianity. All attempts at reunion failed and by the fifteenth century was looked upon as a permanent division.

Especially beginning with the ninth century there were huge defections from the Catholic Church as millions of its followers left their ranks to be baptized and join with the Anabaptists. As a result, crusades were launched against the Waldenses; John Huss was burned at the stake, and the inquisition with varying degrees of success, attempted to enforce conformity wherever it could compel the secular power to do its bidding. This was soon followed by the Reformation on the part of many.

It is true that Luther, Calvin and Zwingli viewed the Roman Catholic Church as a fallen church, but neither of them agreed with the Anabaptists in holding that the fall was total and the Roman Church completely apostate. All three felt that they were simply remodeling a structure upon the same time-honored foundation, and that they were in vital communion with the one true church of Christ. Infant baptism became the outward symbol of this basic assumption.

The Baptists, however, viewed the fall of that church as total and absolute. They dated the fall primarily with the union of church and state which, according to them was first implemented by Constantine the Great. In no sense could the Anabaptists accept the church of Rome as the true church.

Though the Anabaptists did feel a kinship with some of the Reformers, recognizing that every regenerate man, because of his relationship to Christ was a member of the family of God, they had no interest in making such a concept a cause for either organic unity with these new denominations nor for cooperation with them. They were primarily concerned with building visible churches upon the foundation of Christ and the apostles. Apostolic succession, corporate unity, and political power had absolutely no attraction for them. It was their conviction that they stood in relation to Christ and the apostles where first century Christians stood, and that it was they themselves who had not only preserved doctrinal purity since New Testament days but also were the direct successors to the New Testament churches that had continued in an unbroken line until then.

If one's doctrine of the origin of the church is scriptural, it will be in harmony with the other doctrines of God's grace. If it is unscriptural, it will conflict with those doctrines, and before the world and on the minds of the members who uphold such a church will certainly tend to obscure, if not to efface these doctrines. Both Luther and Calvin saw clearly that the central point of their controversy with Rome was just this doctrine of the church. Luther said: "What is the dispute between the Papists and us? It is the dispute about the true Christian church. The dispute is not whether we must believe the church—whether there is a church—but which is the true church." Calvin said: "We only contend for a true and legitimate constitution of the church, which requires, not only a communion in the sacraments which are the signs of a Christian profession, but above all, an agreement in doctrine."

Luther and Zwingli and their followers separated from and condemned the Roman Catholic church, not on account of the Romish origin or foundation of their church, but on account of the false doctrines which Rome taught respecting salvation. In thus separating from Rome and preaching the truth, they deserve the highest commendation. But they retained essentially the Roman Catholic origin of the churches.

The introduction of W. M. Nevins in his book *Alien Baptism and the Baptists* (published by Challenge Press) reads as follows: "In 1854, the Presbyterian General Assembly met in Buffalo, New York, and this question was presented to them for their decision:

"Are Romish baptisms and ordinations valid?"

"There was a heated discussion over this question. The majority report of the committee was that all ordinations at the hands of the Romish priests were invalid, because the Roman Catholic Church was no church of Christ, but anti-Christ, and therefore the baptisms and ordinations of such an apostate body are null and void.

"The minority report, on the other hand, contended that if they denied the church of Rome to be a true church of Christ, they unchurched themselves, since they came out of Rome, and received their baptisms and ordinations therefrom. Finding they could not extricate themselves from the dilemma, they moved an indefinite postponement of the question.

"Baptists are and have ever been faced with the same question 'Are the baptisms and ordinations of Rome valid?' [However, we are also faced with another question of equal importance, are the baptisms and ordinations of Protestants valid? —MLMJr.] But since Baptists did not come out of Rome, neither out of the Protestant bodies, the contention of the minority report is not pertinent to us, and we can answer squarely, 'No.' This has been the Baptist answer for nearly 1,600 years of marvelous history." In view of this, what should our relationship be with other denominations. A tract written by J. M. Pendleton entitled *An Old Landmark Re-set* provided the basis for a set of five questions presented by J. R. Graves to a group of interested Baptists at Cotton Grove, Tennessee, June 24, 1851. These questions are:

1. Can Baptists consistently, with their principles of the scriptures, recognize those societies, not organized according to the pattern of the Jerusalem church, but possessing a different government, different officers, a different class of membership, different ordinances, doctrines and practices, as the Church of Christ?
2. Ought they to be called Gospel Churches or Churches in a religious sense?
3. Can we consistently recognize the ministers of such irregular and unscriptural bodies, as gospel ministers in their official capacity?
4. Is it not virtually recognizing them as official ministers to invite them into our pulpits, or by any other act that would or could be construed into such a recognition?
5. Can we consistently address as brethren, those professing Christianity who not only have not the doctrines of Christ and walk not according to His commandments, but are arrayed in direct and bitter opposition to them?

Most questions like these are ignored today or else there is a belief that all churches and all denominations are equally scriptural and therefore questions of this nature pose no problem for them. To some, denominations are simply minor branches or divisions of the one true church which ultimately will embrace all denominations in one final universal visible church. Samuel J. Andrews in speaking of this wrote: "There are those who think little of the church as a historic institution to be preserved and unchanged, but believe that there will be a wider and overgrowing spread of Christianity as a spiritual influence till the entire world is leavened. A new era is to come about and the new era they expect will come through a Christianized civilization and the enlargement of Christendom to embrace all denominations and all nations."

It is based on the mistaken idea that the whole world is to become Christian. Advocates of this position interpret the Parable of the Leaven (Matthew 13:33), along with a few other Scriptures, as teaching that the leaven represents the gospel, the woman represents the church, and the meal represents the world, and since the leaven is going to permeate the entire world through the efforts of the woman, the conclusion is that this universal church is ultimately going to succeed in converting the whole world. It is for this reason that Dr. Jack Van Impe, referred to earlier, cited a statement by Dr. Paul E. Billheimer in which he said: "I believe personally that the main thing hindering the return of the Lord is the disunity of the body. This is the greatest sin in the church." Their attitude is "major only on the 'major' doctrines and not divide over the 'minor' doctrines. Preach only so-called 'positive messages.' After all, God called me to win souls not to criticize others." One simply needs to read Jude 3-4 to refute such arguments as this.

In this parable, they teach that the woman represents the church and the meal represents the world, and since the leaven is going to permeate the entire world through the efforts of the woman, then this universal church is ultimately going to succeed in converting the whole world to Christ. On the contrary, this woman that we see in the Parable of the Leaven is the same woman we read of in Revelation 17 and 18 where she is referred to as "the great whore."

John identifies her as the Roman Catholic Church and the offspring of this great whore are the Protestant churches resulting from her illicit love affairs. How can we fellowship with such? Can we abandon the New Testament church and join ourselves to an adulteress? God forbid!

Christendom instead must be recognized as a battlefield where the old elements and the new are struggling together not merging or cooperating together. Liberals are confronting conservatives: Neo-orthodoxy is confronting orthodoxy. Modernists are confronting fundamentalists. Truth is confronting error. In interdenominationalism the assailants and the defenders are so inextricably mingled that one cannot separate the enemy from friend. This is one of the results of interdenominationalism. Denominations become so intertwined in the mind of the world that there is lost any clear distinction between them, so that they are all equated one with another, and Baptists lose their distinctive identity and our trumpet no longer blows a clear and certain sound.

But Christ did not build churches in deadly antagonism to each other, and in open rebellion to His authority— churches constitutionally divided against each other—composed of materials so heterogeneous and discordant that they could never be "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2:21). Christ Himself said "every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation" (Matthew 12:25). Yet He says His church will stand forever and therefore, it is not divided against itself—composed of discordant and antagonistic constituencies or churches.

True churches of Christ are not diverse the one from the other, but the equals of each other, having the same character of membership, the same form of organization, the same ordinances in form and design, and holding and teaching the same fundamental doctrines.

There are three mathematical axioms which can apply right here as well as to the field of mathematics.

1. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.
2. Things unequal to each other can not all be equal to the same thing—one and only one may be.
3. Of contradictory propositions, if one be true all the others are false.

Now applying these propositions to the various churches and denominations, each claiming to be equal to the same thing—a scriptural church—we see the falsity of the claim that all are scriptural. In fact, each one when asked will deny that the others are equal to itself or the New Testament model. So these denominations are not all equal to each other and not even any two are essentially alike. Note the differences between the Methodists and the Presbyterians. One is Arminian the other Calvinistic in doctrine—poles apart on the doctrinal scale. Among all the denominations, if one can be found that is patterned after the New Testament churches, whether that one be the Catholic, the Methodist, or the Baptist church, only that one is a New Testament or scriptural church. All the contradictory denominations in existence today can not be equally true—if one is New Testament, only one can be.

If we conclude that the Catholic church is a New Testament church, does not that conclusion affirm that all others are not? If I should conclude that all are New Testament churches it would be either through ignorance or hypocrisy. Therefore, if we believe that Baptist churches are true New Testament churches, all others are false. If we conclude that all are New Testament churches, it admits that Christ is the originator of all these denominations, and that He Himself originated or authorized the origination of each of these antagonistic denominations that shall remain in perpetual conflict until one has either swallowed up or exterminated all of the others. It is preposterous to think that Christ would begin all these contradictory organizations that call themselves churches. Are we willing to concede that the oceans of blood or *The Trail of Blood* precipitated against our Baptist forefathers by these

Catholic and Protestant denominations, was done by those who were really New Testament churches all along?

That each denomination is a separate church, equally scriptural as Baptist churches is false on its face. The popular "branch theory" is an absurdity. This theory is based upon a false assumption that all the leading popular denominations, variant and antagonistic though they be, are branches of "the Church of Christ." Branch is a relative term, necessarily implying a trunk or body, but these proponents are unable to tell us what or where the trunk of this tree is. The absurdity of this idea must be apparent to even the most naive Christian when one thinks of a tree bearing natural branches of perhaps 200 or more different kinds of wood, and without a body or trunk.

Van Impe used the illustration of fingers on a hand by asking the question "Since we are all members of the one body, are we not 'fingers' on the same hand as it were?" This begs the question by making two false assumptions. The first false assumption is that all of us are on the same hand. The second one is that we are all in the same body. This Baptists emphatically deny. *We are not fingers on the same hand nor are we members of the same body.* A hand with every finger being totally different from every other finger would certainly be a monstrosity and a deformed hand, would it not?

What is the body of Christ? If it is not the sum total of all believers, then what is it? Paul tells us in Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." In this passage we see that the church is the body and since Christ has many churches, He has many bodies, for He has as many bodies as He has churches.

Furthermore, He is the Head of everyone of them just as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:3 He is the Head of every man. He is the sovereign ruler over each church, having been made the Head following His resurrection from the dead (Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23). Paul also tells us that He is "over" the house of God" in Hebrews 3:1-6.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul shows that the body he is writing about is the church of Corinth and not a universal invisible body, for in verse 27 he says: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." This shows us that the hand, the foot, the eye, etc. does not refer to various denominations but to the membership that made up the church of Corinth.

Others refer to the broad phrase of a church army, Christ being the "captain" and the various denominations the various platoons, companies, regiments, brigades, etc. and the different denominational creeds the flags under which they fight. This theory breaks down when we consider the fact that the various parts of an army are all under the same laws and regulations, trained by the same tactics, and not in deadly conflict with each other—platoon against platoon, company against company, regiment against regiment, as the different denominations have been from the day they started, and continue to do even today, and will continue to do so as long as they hold and teach different and antagonistic doctrines. They are not fighting a common foe, but they are fighting each other.

The universal church theory is equally fallacious in spite of its popularity among all Protestant denominations and those Baptists who have been misled or deceived. This theory is as false as the others mentioned above as it violates the fact that one scriptural church must be equal to any other scriptural church, else Christ would have a kingdom divided against itself. Yet we see the Protestant denominations discordant and divided against themselves, seeking to destroy each other, and all seeking to destroy Baptists. Such teaching will drive men away from the Bible. Convince a man that Christ did originate all these diverse denominations, and that Christ is really the Creator of all the absurd and contradictory doctrines and systems of

faith, and he will reject all the Bible teachings and be an infidel or a fool. Christ has no more two churches, one visible and the other invisible, than He has two kingdoms.

It is impossible to count how many denominations there are in America today let alone the whole world, all diverse and most of them radically differing from each other in the essential elements of a scriptural church, yet each claiming to be alone conformed, or at least, more than any other, conformed to the scriptural model of a Christian church. Now the unthinking multitude is taught from the pulpit and press to believe and to call all these antagonistic denominations, Evangelical churches, meaning scriptural churches, and equally entitled to be considered the equal to any other, and they claim it is proof of "intolerant bigotry" to deny that they are not all scriptural churches or that one is more conformed to the scriptural pattern than the other, or that one alone meets the New Testament standard.

Truth is an expensive article and when a Christian has bought it, he is not at liberty to hide or sell it (Prov. 23:23). He is but a trustee. It is his duty to pass it on as he received it to each succeeding generation. When Baptists participate in interdenominationalism with Protestants and Catholics they sacrifice a portion of the truth, so the honest Christian has but one alternative. He must stultify his reason and common sense, and admit what he knows to be false, or he must dare to stand alone against public opinion whereby he will receive the brunt of sectarian hate hurled against all who oppose their pet theory.

The central point of controversy between Baptists and Protestants is not always the doctrines of grace, for there are many who agree with us on these doctrines, but it is the doctrine of the church, and this we hold to be a point of supreme importance. Baptists are accused of being schismatics because, though we may agree with some Protestants on the great doctrines of the gospel, yet concerning the doctrine of the church, Baptists refuse to acknowledge Protestant churches as rightly begun or formed, or to hold their administration of the ordinances as scriptural. Since we acknowledge that many of them do preach the gospel, it is assumed that we ought to grant everything else. True Baptists refuse to walk together where we think others offend against Christ's truth. Though the Protestant denominations differ from each other from the Calvinistic Presbyterians on one extreme to the Arminian Methodists on the other, yet all have at their base the same origin of their churches—a human founder and based upon a believe in the universal, invisible church concept. Therefore our difference with them and our opposition to them is not minor but stands on the deepest principle as that of what constitutes a true New Testament church. Though this may be considered a minor doctrine to Protestants, it is the basic doctrine that gives Baptists their real reason for existence, for without this doctrine we would cease to be Baptists.

The Scriptures that Jesus founded His own church during His own ministry as we have seen, Protestants deny, but all admit that at least there was a New Testament church as early as the day of Pentecost. Now, if the church has not been perpetuated it is because of one or both of two things: *Christ either did not want it perpetuated or was unable to perpetuate it.*

The question now raised is, did Christ want His church or churches perpetuated?

Can anyone give any proof that Christ did not want His churches perpetuated; is there anything in His teaching to that effect? Can anyone give any good reason why these churches should not be perpetuated? We think no one will attempt to give either. Now there are both good reasons why, and scriptural proof that these churches should be perpetuated. If the church was established because of certain existing conditions and needs, then it should have been perpetuated for the same reason, for these conditions and needs have been perpetuated. Every argument in favor of the establishment of the church will hold good in favor of the perpetuity of it. Not a reason can be given in favor of the establishment of the church which is not a reason in favor of its perpetuity.

So, looking at the question simply from the standpoint of reason, we see no reason why it should not have been perpetuated, but good reasons why it should have been perpetuated. As to the scriptural proof, it seems to us if the Scriptures teach anything clearly and positively they teach that it was the purpose of the Lord to perpetuate the organization which He established in the world.

We learn that "Christ gave himself for the church that he might present it unto himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," and said of this church, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," referring, no doubt, to its indestructibility.

Again, when Christ instituted the ordinance known as the Lord's Supper, and gave it to His church to be observed, He said, "This do in remembrance of me till I come." Now, no one will deny that if the *doing* of a thing is to be perpetuated, the *doers* of that thing must also be perpetuated. This is a self-evident proposition. If the observance of the Lord's Supper is to be perpetuated "till I come," then those who observe it (which all admit is the church) must be perpetuated "till I come."

Let me remind you again that Christ, when He gave the great commission to His disciples, said, "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:28-29). This commission was given, not to the apostles as such, for in that case when the last apostle died the commission would have been dead. The commission was given to Christ's disciples in their organic capacity as His church. The preaching of the gospel, the administering of the ordinances, the teaching and building up of the church is a work which the Lord committed to His blood-bought, divinely-appointed and spirit-guided churches. Christ promised to be with these churches from the day He gave the great commission to the end of the world. If this promise is made good the churches must be perpetuated from the giving of the great commission to the end of the world.

One cannot be with a thing which is not. If "I am *with* you to the end of the world" you must *be* to the end of the world. Thus we see both reason and the Scriptures sustain the position that it was Christ's purpose to perpetuate His churches. Certainly no sane person would say Christ did not want His churches perpetuated. This, to our mind, would be to charge the Lord with folly. It is to say Christ made a mistake. Either He established His churches too soon, or before "the fullness of time had come," and, discovering His mistake, later attempted to rectify it by discontinuing them for a season. This is a serious charge, and the establishment of which would be to destroy the validity and the value of the churches altogether.

CHRIST'S ABILITY TO PERPETUATE HIS CHURCHES.

Let us now consider the second proposition, Christ's ability to perpetuate His churches. Bear in mind that our claim is that if the churches of Christ have not been perpetuated, it is because Christ either did not want them perpetuated, or was not able to do what He wanted to do. In the foregoing it has been proven that it was Christ's purpose to perpetuate His churches. Was He able to do it? The answer to this question involves the deity of Christ. If He was not able to do what He wanted to do, then He was not God. If He is God He can do whatever He wants to do. There are certain things which God cannot do, but they are only the things which God doesn't want to do. The reason He can't do them is because He doesn't want to do them, and the reason He doesn't want to do them is because they are not consistent with His nature. "God cannot lie."

Thus the question has narrowed down to this: Was Christ divine? Did He have all power? The answer is obvious if one is to believe the Bible.

There was a church of Christ in existence at least as early as the Day of Pentecost, for members were added to it that day. If Christ wanted this church perpetuated, and it seems that

He did, why has it not been perpetuated? "But, oh," claims some overcautious one, "we have no reliable unbroken record of the churches back to the day of Pentecost." That, however, has nothing to do with this question. Christ promised to preserve His churches, *but He did not promise to preserve the record* of these churches among men. The fact that I have no "reliable unbroken record" back to Adam is not sufficient ground to deny the fact that I am a descendant of Adam. The very fact that God started the race with Adam, told him to multiply and replenish the earth, and the very fact that at the flood, when nearly all of the race was destroyed, he saved a remnant, or seed, and sent them out with the same command to multiply, and the fact that I am here, with all the striking characteristics of Adam, are rather *prima facie* evidence that Father Adam has been perpetuated. To deny one is a descendant of Adam because one has no preserved history back to Adam is sheer nonsense, and to deny that the churches of Christ have been perpetuated from the establishment of the first church until now, because we have no preserved record of them through all these ages is equally nonsensical.

Christ had a church at least as early as the Day of Pentecost. If this church has not been perpetuated it is because He either did not want it perpetuated, or was not able to do what He wanted to do. No earnest, conscientious Christian would be willing to accept either horn of that dilemma.

The New Testament uses the word church in only two senses—the concrete and the abstract. I find no justification for a third use, a so-called "glory church" of the future which will include all true believers of all times to be assembled in eternity. This so-called "glory church" mitigates against and minimizes the importance of the New Testament church today in our age. After all, if all believers are going to be in that "glory church" there is very little difference between that and the universal invisible church taught today, and it is just one small step to move from the "glory church" concept to the invisible universal church concept. In fact, some independent Baptists have done that very thing.

The noted Baptist writer E. T. Hiscox, in his book *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*, discusses several passages of scripture that are used to teach either a universal invisible church or a future "glory church" composed of all the saved. He writes:

But when it is said, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church" etc., (Eph. 5:25, 27), it presumably refers to no particular congregation of believers, but to the entire company of the saved—the universal invisible Church. In the same way is interpreted the much-quoted declaration of Jesus: "On this rock will I build my Church" (Matthew 16:18). Also, "To the intent that now . . . might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). "The general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23). These, with a few other passages, are supposed to refer not to any localized congregations of believers, but to the universal fellowship of the faithful. *And yet it is likely that some of the passages usually thus interpreted might, by a more careful exegesis, be found to bear the primary and literal meaning of a particular congregation.* Certain it is that this literal meaning of the word is its first and ruling signification, as is certified in a vast majority of cases . . . *There is no such thing as a universal church on earth embraced in one grand communion."*

The abstract or general use of the word church is used when no particular church is in view. Paul uses this word in the book of Ephesians chapter 5. Our Lord also used this word in this sense in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18. The concrete or particular use of the word is its most common use in the New Testament where it refers to a particular assembly in some particular location.

It is at this point, the church, that we differ from our Protestant friends. It is this basic and fundamental doctrine of the church that we must compromise if we participate in any interdenominational or ecumenical movement—we compromise the doctrine of the New Testament church and all that that entails.

However, growing out of this erroneous doctrine are many other errors in Protestantism that makes it impossible for Baptist churches to cooperate in interdenominational movements. Some of these errors are:

1. The admission of unbelievers to church membership—mostly through infant baptism. I know that each Protestant denomination has its own method of explaining this away, each differing from the other, but the end result is to bring into their churches those who are unbelievers.

2. The making of church membership to precede the hearing of the Word. This brings us to another difficulty of great importance. The Scriptures know nothing and we know nothing of churches which are not the body of Christ (Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 12:27; etc.). To be in the church is, according to the New Testament, to be in Christ. Not that the church and Christ are synonymous; but because none were to be admitted but those who gave evidence of being in Christ.

Now the Scriptures teach that the instrument to bring about our union with Christ and His church is the Word (1 Pet. 1:23; Rom. 10:17; 10:14; Jam. 1:18). But, if before hearing, before faith, before the receiving of the Word, either an outward ordinance or a church is placed as a means of union with Christ, we see a positive contradiction between the Scriptures and the constitution of such a church. This makes the union with Christ external and formal rather than internal and spiritual. From the Protestant standpoint, the first thing needed is not the Word and faith but the church. If this were true, that the church rightly precedes the Word in the salvation of the soul, then why do we not hear the apostles exhorting men to join the church that they may come to Christ, rather than hearing them insisting on attention to the Word that men might be saved. By this doctrine of the Protestant churches, great harm is done to the Word of God and to thousands of souls, in reversing God's order of salvation. The rightful place of the Word is usurped by the church.

It is the belief in this very doctrine that led to Protestant churches joining with the Roman Church in the persecution of our Baptist forefathers. When the Word and its work are put aside as prerequisites of church membership, and the church assumes the place of the Word as the external means for uniting souls to Christ, then that which is merely formal and outward becomes its greatest power, and that which is internal and spiritual becomes secondary. For this reason, it is one of the most amazing facts in history, that all Protestant churches, coming out from under the tyranny of Rome and even protesting against her tyranny over the conscience of men, should have become in a few years almost as bitter persecutors for their form of faith as Rome was for hers, and Baptists suffered at the hands of all of them. Luther and Melancthon persecuted; Zwingli and Calvin persecuted; the Reformed Church of Holland persecuted; the established Church of England, the Presbyterians of Scotland, the Congregationalists and others even here in our own United States, fell into the same error as Rome had done, and defended it on the same grounds.

Can this strange inconsistency be explained? There is only one apparent solution. Differing as they did from Rome, they actually formed their churches on the same basis as that of Rome. The church was put before the Word and in their view, the salvation of souls demanded its existence, and with no pangs of conscience at all, its defenders would punish with all bodily misery and deprivation of goods, those who denied its validity.

On the other hand, from the very New Testament days to the present, no Baptist church can be shown which has ever favored or defended religious persecution. Nor can any Baptist author be found who has favored or defended religious persecution. Their witness has been clear and unmistakable on the side of religious liberty, not tolerance but freedom, not sufferance for themselves alone, but for all men.

This surely is not due to any intellectual or moral superiority on the part of Baptists, but must be due to a principle that inheres in their religious thinking and that principle is to be found in their belief of the precedence of the Word of God to the church. In our view every man must come face to face with the Word of God. By that Word He must be convinced and must decide the supreme question concerning his soul's eternity before he possesses any qualification for membership in a church. Having brought him face to face with the Word of God, it then becomes a matter between him and God, and no persecution, ordinance nor church can effect the change, which is the work of God's Holy Spirit alone.

A strange thing should be noted here also. When a Protestant argues with a Catholic against the fundamental constitution of the church of Rome he always uses the full Baptist position, but when he argues in favor of his Protestant church, he is compelled to take the Romish position and use Romish arguments.

3. A third error which we will not fully discuss since it has been partially discussed already is the scriptural plan to make church membership precede regeneration. This is pure Protestantism which they stole from Rome and to our eyes appears to be as flat a contradiction of God's plain Word as anything can be.

4. It is an error to allow the church to take the place of faith. Just as the church can not take the place of the Word, neither can it take the place of faith.

There are some radical differences between Baptists and other denominations, and these differences go much deeper than just the ordinances. Our refusal to participate in interdenominational movements or to walk with them in ecumenical movements is not based solely upon their change in the form of baptism, for neither historically nor logically is that true. Suppose all Protestant denominations today returned to the scriptural form of baptism but still retained their peculiar constitution or beginnings as churches, we should still be compelled to protest against them and deny that they were formed according to the Word of God.

Our refusal to participate with them is not based upon any belief among us that they are not excellent Christians, taught of the Spirit in many ways, zealous of good works, who are members of the family of God and have the same blessed hope of eternal life with the Lord. Though we may believe all this, we cannot accept them as scriptural churches because of the defect in their very beginning when they were constituted as churches. They have no scriptural beginning, and this is an error against God's truth and since we love that truth, we must maintain truth over error, and cannot compromise truth for the sake of unity.

This is not a "holier than thou" position. Paul had no such feeling when he withstood Peter to his face because he was to be blamed. It was in the interest of truth which was dearer and more precious and vital than even the friendship of Peter, and I do not believe we have many Baptists today who have pleasure in taking such a position against interdenominationalism, but as we have been saved by the Lord and taught His truth, we must uphold that truth, even if it is opposed, and perhaps especially when it is opposed.

One condition of membership in a New Testament church is baptism. Yet if we participate in interdenominationalism we must be silent on the subject of baptism. The Apostle Paul enforced the obligations to holiness from the fact of baptism, but we must not venture on a similar course. The subject of baptism is like raising a red flag when mentioned by a Baptist

to a Catholic or Protestant. J. M. Pendleton in his book *Baptist Principles* says: "Where there is no baptism, there are no churches."

One has well said: "No Christian, no church has authority to fellowship error, whether it be the error of an individual or the error of thousands as in a denomination. The sincerity of those who hold error, though it may claim tenderness and kindness, is no reason why any Christian should give it his fellowship" (Rom. 10:2-3).

There are four commands of the Lord that I want us to note at this time . Each of these commands makes it impossible for Baptists to participate in interdenominational movements or ecumenical movements. These statements are:

1. "Beware of them" (Col. 2:8-10).
2. "Have no fellowship with them" (2 Thess. 3:6).
3. "Mark them" (Rom. 16:17-18.)
4. "Receive him not" (2 John 9-11.)

Interdenominationalism destroys "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2:21); Interdenominationalism requires a belief in several baptisms (Eph. 4:5); Interdenominationalism denies the unity of the faith for disunity (Eph. 4:13); and Interdenominationalism places love above sound doctrine (1 John 5:2-3).

At this point I want to quote a lesson taken from the Young People's Quarterly for April-May-June, 1964 produced by the Southern Baptist Convention. It is the lesson for June 28 and is the last lesson in the book. The lesson is entitled "The Whole Family of God."

IN A EUROPEAN clock shop one sees old clocks of every design. They are all ticking away as if time's passage depended on them. Upon visiting such a shop, I was startled when a clock chimed the hour of four about five minutes ahead of time by my watch. Soon there was a medley of clocks striking the hour, and after a few minutes of silence a last "Grandfather" gave his benediction.

All of these clocks set differently made me wonder what time it really was. By which clock should I set my watch? Then I thought of the various Christian denominations and their differences. Which one is right? As a Baptist, I asked myself whether our denominational clock strikes exactly on the hour.

As I thought further, however, I realized all the clocks were within ten minutes of each other. They all struck four times, and each gave a relatively close account of the true time.

Christians, regardless of denomination, are basically close together as one body in Christ. Every real Christian believes in God and his Son, Jesus Christ. All have been forgiven of their sins and made sons of the Father. This oneness in Christ is more important than our differences.

[Ephesians 2:11-22 is quoted at this point.]

The point of division in the New Testament church was the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Our problems are different, but the principle used in dealing with that problem of division in the early church can be applied to the issues of our day.

HOPE FOR THE GENTILES

This letter was written to Gentile Christians at Ephesus who were asked to join with Jewish Christians in one church.

The pagan religions from which these Gentiles had come did not offer hope. The Gentiles were not part of the covenant-people of God as were members of the Old Testament religious community.

Christ brought hope for the Gentiles. They were neither better nor worse than Jewish Christians. Christ did not see persons as "Jews" or "Greeks," but simply as persons in need of grace. He is the unifying person who brings peace to all who call on him. Christians are given the ability to be reconciling agents of their Master.

THE WALL OF PARTITION REMOVED

The "middle wall of partition" refers to a wall in the Temple courtyard at Jerusalem. The outer court was open to all people. A wall separated that area from an inner court open only to Jews. The historian, Josephus, relates that there were signs engraved on the wall in Latin and Greek, telling Gentiles not to enter the inner court upon pain of death.

The "wall of partition" was, also, a symbol of the whole legalistic system of Jewish rites and observances which separated Jew from Gentile. Christ "abolished" all the walls of division which separate Christians from each other.

Without intending to do so, Christians continue to erect many "walls of partition" which separate them from other Christians. Young people must be careful lest they, too, build walls and defend them, while Christ is at work tearing them down.

Within Christianity there are differences of temperament and tradition. There is variety of belief about doctrine and church practice. Yet believers constitute one body, reconciled to God and each other by the cross.

All Christians stand together as sinners who have been given free pardon by the forgiving grace of Christ. This common experience unites us into one body and gives to all believers equal privilege of access to the Father through "one Spirit." This is the Spirit of the risen Christ, present in his church.

THE CHURCH DESCRIBED

The writer of Ephesians multiplied metaphors to drive home the reality of the essential oneness of all believers.

The figure used to describe the church changes from the "body" to a political analogy. All Christians, this writer claimed, are "fellowcitizens" with the saints. By the next stroke of his pen he presented Christians as members of a family, "the household of God."

The author continued with yet another figure, that of a building, having a foundation of "apostles and prophets." Jesus Christ himself is "the chief corner stone." All the stones are placed in a beautiful design by the builder, so that they are described as "fitly framed together."

In one further change of figure, the writer envisages "a holy temple," apparently conceived as more than one building, and yet together constituting "an habitation of God."

The teaching of the New Testament, here as elsewhere, is that Christians are one body. In the background selection, Ephesians 4:1-16, we are told that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (v. 5). If we accept the possibility that the epistle to the Ephesians was addressed to several churches, can we not recognize the ideal of diversity in unity? Where Christians differ they may yet speak the truth in love and thus make healthy the body of Christ. Is not the measure of our maturity, as stated in verse 13, our willingness to grow into "the unity of the faith"?

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

As Baptists, possessed of strong Bible-based convictions and closely knit by denominational ties, we must surely face the question of our relationship to other Christian bodies. Can we demonstrate before the world oneness in Christ unless we are prepared to pursue possibilities of closer cooperation with other Christian groups?

What is known as the ecumenical movement has a strong following among Christians today. It has grown out of a restudy of the New Testament on the part of sincere men and women whose conclusions we must respect. Whether we can identify ourselves with all their aims is another matter.

Certainly, no Christian group should compromise basic Bible truths for the sake of "togetherness." But is this necessarily required? Cannot mature believers hold fast to their beliefs and at the same time seek areas of fellowship and co-operation with Christians of other denominations?

Zeal for one's own beliefs is commendable. Loyalty to one's own church and denomination is beyond reproach. But need such conviction and loyalty express themselves in violent opposition toward other Christians whose viewpoints differ?

Reconciling principles are clearly taught by the writer of Ephesians. Christ himself is the great reconciler, the one who breaks down walls of division, and brings together, in one Spirit, all the family of God. Let us have strong convictions, but let us also be willing to recognize the Christian likeness in others, to seek fellowship with them, and to learn from them.

Now, I want to assume that I was invited to write this same lesson for this quarterly. Using the same scriptures, same illustrations, and same applications, it would come out quite differently. Here is my version:

In a European clock shop one sees old clocks of every design. They are all ticking away as if time's passage depended on them. Upon visiting such a shop, I was startled when a clock chimed the hour of four about five minutes ahead of time by my watch. Soon there was a medley of clocks striking the hour, and after a few minutes of silence a last "Grandfather" gave his benediction.

All of these clocks set differently made me wonder what time it really was. By which clock should I set my watch? Then I thought of the various Christian denominations and their differences. Which one is right? As a Baptist, I asked myself whether our denominational clock strikes exactly on the hour.

As I thought further, however, I realized all the clocks were within ten minutes of each other. They all struck four times, and each gave a relatively close account of the true time, *yet only one is the correct clock from which all other clocks must be timed or set*. Each clock, to be correct and accurate, must be a duplicate of the first pattern clock and must continue to maintain the same exact time as the pattern clock or it is wrong.

Christians, regardless of denomination, are basically close together as members of the family of God, but all Christians are not in the body of Christ. Every real Christian believes in God and His Son, Jesus Christ. All have been forgiven of their sins and made sons of the Father. But this oneness in Christ does not replace our obedience to Christ and is not more important than our obedience to Christ.

The point of division in the New Testament church and interdenominationalism is the relationship between God's church and man's church; between true churches and false churches. Our problems may be different today from those in New Testament days, but the principle used in dealing with the problems in the early church can be applied to the issues of our day.

This letter, the book of Ephesians, was written to Gentile Christians at Ephesus who were taught that the unity that God desires of His people is a seven-fold "unity of the faith"; that this "unity of the spirit" can only be obtained or attained when there is full agreement on the seven principles or doctrines as laid down by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:3-6. Without such unity of belief churches cannot cooperate together for Amos said "Can two walk

together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Even with unity of belief there can be no organizational structure that would combine or merge these churches together into an organization.

The "middle wall of partition" refers to a wall in the Temple courtyard at Jerusalem. The outer court was open to all people. A wall separated that area from an inner court open only to Jews. The historian, Josephus, relates that there were signs engraved on the wall in Latin and Greek, telling Gentiles not to enter the inner court upon pain of death.

The "wall of partition" was, also, a symbol of the whole legalistic system of Jewish rites and observances which separated Jew from Gentile. Christ "abolished" this "wall of partition" which separated Jews from Gentiles, but in the New Testament He established another "wall of partition" to separate unbelievers from believers, and indirectly, obedient Christians from disobedient Christians. That "wall of partition" is baptism. God has placed baptism as a requirement for being a member of a New Testament church, so that all Christians may become members of a New Testament church, but only if they are willing to follow the example of Jesus Christ by being baptized under the authority of a Baptist church. We today must be careful lest we tear down this wall which Christ Himself has established.

Within Christianity there are differences of temperament and tradition. There is a variety of belief about doctrine and church practice. All Christians stand together as sinners who have been given free pardon by the forgiving grace of Christ. That common experience unites us into the family of God and gives to all believers equal privilege of access to the Father, but the experience of the New Birth does not place us into the body of Christ. It is scriptural baptism that admits us into the body of Christ, and all believers who fail at this point are not members of the Lord's body, New Testament churches.

The writer of Ephesians multiplied metaphors to drive home the reality of the unity that God desires of all believers.

The figure used to describe the church changes from the "body" to a political analogy. All Christians, this writer claimed, are "fellowcitizens" with the saints. By the next stroke of his pen he presented members of New Testament churches as "the household of God."

The author continued with yet another figure, that of a building, having a foundation of "apostles and prophets" Jesus Christ Himself as "the chief corner stone." All the stones are placed in a beautiful design by the builder, so that they are described as "fitly framed together." They are placed into this building through the ordinance of baptism, else they would not be "fitly framed together" which indicates unity.

In one further change of figure, the writer envisages "a holy temple," constituting "an habitation of God."

The teaching of the New Testament, here as elsewhere, is that each New Testament church is one body. In the background selection, Ephesians 4:1-16, we are told that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (v. 5). If we understand the fact that the epistle to the Ephesians was addressed to the Ephesian church and was to be circulated to all other churches, can we not recognize the importance of these seven doctrines if there is to be unity? Is not the measure of our obedience and maturity as Christians our willingness to grow into and submit ourselves to "the unity of the faith" that the Lord gives us through the Apostle Paul?

As Baptists, possessed of strong Bible-based convictions we must surely face the question of our relationship to other Christian bodies. Can we demonstrate before the world our obedience to Christ unless we are prepared to maintain the New Testament teachings regarding the church and refuse to take part in any interdenominational movement or activity where the New Testament church is involved?

What is known as the ecumenical movement or interdenominationalism has a strong following among Christians today, including some Baptists. It has grown through either a lack of study or a rejection of the New Testament teachings concerning the Lord's church on the part of sincere men and women who are more concerned about what others might think than they are about what Christ thinks.

Certainly we Baptists should not compromise our doctrines nor the express commands of our Lord simply for the sake of "togetherness." Mature Christians and obedient Christians will hold fast to their beliefs as laid down and taught by our Savior and His apostles in the New Testament. Though there may be areas of fellowship and cooperation with Christians of other denominations on an individual basis, there is no room for such compromise on the part of God's churches.

Reconciling principles are clearly taught by the writer of Ephesians. Christ Himself is the great reconciler. If there is to be unity and full fellowship with other Christians or non-Baptists, it must be on the principles as laid down in the New Testament. When our brethren and friends in other denominations are willing to submit to the same authority of Jesus Christ as we are, then we shall be glad to extend the hand of fellowship to them on the same basis that we do those who are members of our churches. That hand of fellowship is extended upon their submission to the ordinance of baptism at the hands of a Baptist church. Until then, we cannot consider them as members of the body of Christ or members of a New Testament church, for baptism at the hands of a New Testament (Baptist) church is essential for membership in one of the Lord's churches. We as Baptists should be ready to welcome into our fellowship and into our churches all believers who are willing to come into the church on the same basis as did our Savior, baptism at the hands of a New Testament church, for our Savior too was baptized by a Baptist preacher, John the Baptist.

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The fundamental position with Baptists in regard to all these matters is that all efforts for Christian union or interdenominational cooperation must be based upon loyalty to the truth. As Baptists we approach these questions with the clear conviction in our souls that the things for which we stand are not trifles, that they are not nonessential, but they are real.

We must make a clear distinction in our thinking between that which we can do as individuals and that in which we would have our church as an organization take part, such as, for example, the Bill Gothard movement. An individual pastor might go, but to recommend it to his church and seek to get as many as possible to attend, to some may be borderline, but in my judgment it means one has crossed that line which is proper. Have we not brought interdenominationalism into our churches when we do that? I have done some things in the past that today I consider borderline, and I would not do those same things today. It is in this area that we must tread very carefully.

This passes no judgment upon the material that is taught, but should cause us to reflect upon whether we have compromised our position as Baptists. Even if everything taught was right, it is wrong to participate in interdenominational movements.

Some Baptists, and even some who are not Baptists, do not realize how singular Baptists are among the great bodies of Christendom. We stand alone in our viewpoints even more positively than we stand alone in many of our distinctive principles. We have a different way of looking at things. It is comparatively easy for many Christian bodies to work together, and they do not understand why it is difficult for us, but conscience will not allow it.

The question of interdenominational cooperation is a very big one. We can only settle ourselves upon great principles. As Baptists, we must stand for loyalty to Christ, for the Bible as God's book, and for personal and spiritual religion. Our attitude towards others must be the attitude of those to whom these principles are dear. That attitude will not be one of arrogance, bitterness or hostility; it will be the attitude of broad, sympathetic love, but of clear, definite conviction. We must desire to see the Bible put to the forefront and must sympathize with all who would honestly go with us to find its teaching. We have a friendship with all those who are trying to live up to that which the Bible teaches, even though their interpretation shall be different from ours. We are zealous for our doctrines because we believe that they guard against errors which have perverted and obscured the truth, and we can never forsake the truth for the convenience of interdenominationalism.

There are some important lessons for us to learn here. If we have more truth on our side, by that we are placed under a greater responsibility—a responsibility not just

answered by a mere vocal protest, but one that demands of us lives wholly consecrated to the Lord. The Baptist who participates in interdenominationalism has no excuse, and will be judged worthy of a deeper condemnation than those who have not seen God's truth so clearly. We who have the truth—we who know the truth— must be pure in our doctrine if we are to be true witnesses for our God and His Christ.

Interdenominationalism is based on a kind of unity which is conceived more as an outward expression than an inward reality. Interdenominationalism requires the acceptance of all kinds of baptism and a kind of intercommunion. It requires the recognition of infant baptism on the part of Baptists as valid baptism.

Our churches, while holding fast to the form of sound words, have been insensibly beguiled by the fraternal feeling and the plea of courtesy into the practical surrender of the purpose for our separate existence.

True Baptists have never accepted a universal church concept. The commission God gave to His church cannot be carried on by a universal invisible church. Only a local visible church can do this and for that reason, Baptists energies have been directed toward the planting of churches in all parts of the world in order to win men to Christ. It is the church in the concrete, not in the abstract, which has compelled their interest. It is here where the work is done, the gospel preached, young men are called, lives strengthened, and men transformed. This is the church that salts and gives light to the world. The man in the jungle, on the small town square or downtown fifth avenue is brought to a face-to-face encounter with the living Christ because a local visible Baptist church was there witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Let no one imagine that there is anything in itself pleasant in the stand which Baptists feel compelled to take. Only our loyalty and our allegiance to Jesus Christ our King could keep us there. It would be far more pleasant, could we with clear conscience, cordially merge with other denominations or fully cooperate with them in ecumenical or interdenominational movements, but love cannot be applied at the sacrifice of duty. That is false liberality which for the sake of union would forsake the positive commands of Scripture. The desire for association is not less powerful in our hearts than in the hearts of others, but it can not annihilate our obligations. The principles which guided the apostles, we may safely follow wherever they lead. If they were once right, they are forever right. They constitute a standard of appeal amid the compromises of our day. Their straight line is in contrast to this crooked generation. Let us follow that straight line.