

# BAPTIST CHURCH ASSOCIATIONS

## Outline

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- C. Not to promulgate a social gospel
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## I. What is an Association?

### A. It is not "the church."

It is grossly erroneous to speak of an association or a convention as "the church." An association, properly speaking, is composed of churches as units, whereas a church consists of individual members who have covenanted to form an independent body.

### B. It is not "the denomination."

By "denomination" is meant a group of churches united by the common ties of faith and worship. Wherever churches thus bound are found, regardless of color or race, they are of the same denomination. A church organized anywhere upon that basis automatically becomes one of the group, or "denomination," as that is done by the spirit of principle rather than by a vote of an association, or convention, or council, or synod, or pontifical decrees. As a church, newly organized, enters into the general group of churches, or "denomination," by the adoption of common ties of faith and worship, she can cease being in the "denomination" only by a rejection of them. Churches may choose to associate with other churches of like faith in a particular work and may even bar others who are not in sympathy with their system of association, but no church can be excluded from the "denomination," as such, by vote or decree.

The Word of God is the tie that binds Scriptural churches. The Bible is their "creed." Without the Bible they have no creed. Often and in many places Baptists have given expressions to their creed both orally and in writing. Expression of a creed may be in the form of a sermon, discourse, lecture or treatise. It may be put forth from memory, from notes on paper, slate, chart or blackboard. It may be printed in books or in newspapers, or broadcast over radio or television. Whatever form or medium, it is a mere expression of the creed and not the creed itself.

All denominations say that they accept the Bible, but how do we know whether they do or not unless they give expression to their beliefs in some tangible form? The word, "creed," is from the Latin verb, "**credo**," which means "I believe."

Luke began the book bearing his name by saying: "**Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are surely believed among us.**" Those things "surely believed" among the New Testament saints, being divine principles, constituted their faith or creed. Such is the Baptist creed.

### **C. It is not a convention.**

A convention is a body of delegates or individuals -- not an association of churches. An association, as such, does not meet. The meeting is spoken of as an "association" only in an accommodative sense. It is a mockery upon the historic Baptist faith and practice for a convention to be called "the denomination" or association. The Baptist church was in existence many centuries before the organization of the first Baptist convention.

### **D. It is not the bride.**

It is absurd to equate an association with the bride of Christ for there may be churches embracing members of the bride which are not in any associational group.

### **E. An association is the mutual relationship of two or more churches.**

The relationship is formed by churches themselves. An associated work is effected through messengers, letters or contributions. An association is formed the moment two or more churches mutually agree to co-operate. That may be done anytime. The age of an association does not determine its Scriptural right to exist, whether formed in the first century or in modern times. That does not hold true of a "denomination," as such. A denomination must have lineal connection with the New Testament churches, if it is to boast of Scriptural origin.

When the church at Antioch (Acts 15) sent certain brethren to Jerusalem to confer with that church relative to a doctrinal issue, there was an association formed the moment the Jerusalem church agreed to consider the matter. The Antioch church did not bodily go to Jerusalem; she was authoritatively represented by certain brethren.

The idea of an association maintains:

1. That an association, as such, is not organized; therefore, it does not meet. The messengers, meeting by authority of the churches, may organize that "all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). An organization of messengers does not constitute a superior organization of churches, for the churches do not lose their authority by giving their messengers permission to transact business common to all of them, any more than a church loses her authority when she authorizes a building committee or any other committee to do work for her. The Antioch church did not lose her authority by authorizing her messengers to attend to business at the Jerusalem council.

2. The churches, composing and being units of the association, must of necessity have equal rights and privileges.

3. The churches, being equal units, must have the right to an equal number of messengers at a general meeting. That excludes two things: a numerical representation and a money basis. The numerical basis denies the churches as units of an association, and the money basis exalts material things above the spiritual. The convention centralizes controlling power in the hands of the wealthier and larger churches.

#### **F. Is an association of churches Scriptural?**

An association is Scriptural, if it is indeed a "joint-cooperation and fellowship of the churches composing it," allowing each church an equal voice in all matters of common interest,

Authority for church cooperation in an associational capacity upon the basis of equality is found in II Corinthians, chapter 8. In modern parlance we might refer to that work as the "Macedonian Association," which appellation would have been Scriptural to have been applied in Paul's day. At the time Paul wrote that letter, there were at least three churches in the province of Macedonia -- the church at Philippi, the church at Thessalonica, and the church at Berea. In their cooperation they did not form a provincial or state church; each remained an independent unit.

Those churches cooperated by means of contributions and messengers. Their cooperation by means of contributions for the support of the poor saints in Judaea was noted in II Corinthians 8:1-7. (See also Romans 15:26.) Not only did the churches of Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) cooperate by means of contributions, but they also did so through a common treasurer, who was Paul (See II Corinthians 8:4). Paul had an assistant in the person of Titus. Titus had an assistant whose name is not given, but he is generally thought to be Luke (See II Corinthians 8:6, 18). The contributions were more than charity. The material support sent to the saints at Jerusalem not only sustained them physically but also enabled them to carry on their work of preaching, teaching, and worshiping.

The churches of Macedonia and Achaia cooperated by means of messengers who held joint-meetings. In that capacity they selected Titus and the other brethren to handle the business of the churches in the distribution of the funds.

When one is a servant of all the churches in an association, he should be selected jointly by the churches acting through their messengers or representatives. According to the construction of II

Corinthians 8:19, we are certain that Titus and the other brethren were selected in that manner. **". . . And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us, to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind."** They were **chosen of the churches**, or **by** the churches, as the original Greek word allows. The **Emphatic Diaglott** has **"voted"** by the churches. Rotherham put it **"appointed,"** and other translations have **"elected"** by the churches." Whether we say chosen, elected, voted, or appointed, the will of the churches was made known by a single vote, not by each church voting separately and at different times. The original word (a form of **cheirotoneo**) used in verse 19 indicates that the vote was taken by "stretching out the hand." That implies that there was but one group voting. The group must have been the assembled messengers. Would all the churches, if voting separately and at different times, have employed the identical method? The Scriptures do not indicate that that was the only method which the New Testament churches used to determine a majority voice (See Acts 1:26). The brethren were chosen or elected by the churches by a common vote. The conclusion is positive: There is an example in the New Testament of business having been jointly administered by churches in association.

## **II. Powers of an Association**

### **A. Not legislative**

No association of churches has Scriptural warrant to make laws by which the churches are to be governed. Such a highhanded claim is peculiar to confederations and hierarchies, but not to Baptist assemblies, whether meeting in church or associational capacity. On the other hand, with Scriptural backing, associational messengers may adopt "Articles of Agreement" (often called "Statements of Principles of Cooperation") for a due order of procedure. Such is merely a setting forth of a Scriptural plan of cooperation.

### **B. Advisory through messengers**

Messengers, in an associational capacity, often find it advisable to send back to the churches certain recommendations for work to be done. No church is absolutely bound to accept any recommendation, but most of them do because they have adopted the "Statement of Principles of Cooperation," or "Articles of Agreement." The right to disagree on certain policies of work and still remain in fellowship is a Baptist heritage, for it has been an age-long trait of Baptists not to be pushed around.

### **C. Executive of the will of the Master**

Instead of making laws, the churches have been entrusted with the responsibility of executing or administering the will of Christ, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. That principle is still taught and practiced by New Testament churches.

Article VI of the "Statement of Principles of Cooperation" of the Baptist Missionary Association of America says: **"The powers of this Association are limited to the execution of the expressed will of the churches composing it according to the teachings of the New Testament Scriptures; the Association, in its annual session, will elect such officers as are**

**necessary for the expediting of its deliberations and work, and appoint special committees as are necessary to transact any business as may be directed by the churches composing it."**

That limits the work of the messengers to the will of the churches, in whom divine authority rests to administer the affairs of the Lord until He shall come again. The principle is backed by the Scriptures.

The Great Commission says: **". . . Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen,"** Matthew 28:18-20.

Christ, backed by full power or authority in both heaven and earth, commissioned His church to carry out His will "unto the end of the world," that is unto the end of this age.

The church is not left to battle alone in the execution of the divine will, for she has the promise of Jesus.

**"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you,"** John 16:7.

The administration of the will of the Lord, under the personal supervision of the Spirit was assumed by the church the moment Jesus ascended to heaven. ". . . When he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost," John 20:22. Having already received the Spirit in His quickening and illuminating power, the disciples then received Him in an administrative sense. That was the fulfillment of the promise made in Luke 12:52. **"Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** It was already theirs in membership and service, but not until Jesus went away did they possess its administration, The church is authorized to "occupy till He comes" (Luke 19:18).

### **III. The Purpose of Associations**

#### **A. Not to promote political ideologies**

When Jesus exhorted His inquirers "to render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and unto God the things that belong to God," He established once and for all the principle of separation of church and state. When He declared that His kingdom was not of the world. He manifested His will that His churches should not mimic the world in the execution of their work. They should not employ armies, navies, or any other military powers such as human governments ordain; neither should they resort to political expediences to effect the divine purposes through them. The example of the apostles and the first-century disciples is noteworthy. As they "went everywhere preaching the gospel," they neither condemned the pagan government of the time, nor advocated any political ideology. In their silence toward the form of government of the time, they proclaimed a gospel that eventually overthrew the pagan government by its

acceptance in the hearts and lives of people. Human or civil government as such, is ordained by the Lord, but any unchristian enactments thereof are not ordained.

### **B. Not to conquer the world**

The conquest idea of the gospel is foreign to the Word of God. The Master did not say to His church, "Go ye therefore and conquer the world" (a scheme held by the Romanists) but to disciple peoples of all nations by taking the gospel to all mankind. The churches will never "take the world for Christ," but they can take Christ to the world. The Lord's prophecy that the world will be godless at His second coming as it was in the days of Noah is grounds for the belief that the world will never be conquered by the gospel. At His second coming Christ will conquer the world by the brightness of His appearing and establish universal peace upon the earth.

### **C. Not to promulgate a social gospel**

The social gospel proponents propose to usher in a Utopian world by perfecting the social status of the individual and society. They hold that no particular creed need be believed or advocated, nor should any particular religious system be held up as the criterion. They would create such an ideal state by fusing all the good points in all religions where they co-exist whether they be Christianity Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or any others.

*That theory denies the necessity of the new birth and smacks of universalism. In denying the new birth as taught by Christ, it improperly evaluates man's nature as being inherently holy, whereas the Apostle Paul declared that "we are by nature the children of wrath." Taking man in his natural holiness (as they teach) they propose to lead him to heaven by a system of training. In the event he falls into debauchery, he need only to quit his sins and live an upright life in order to get to heaven when he dies.*

Not only does that theory deny the necessity of the new birth, but it also denies the necessity of the cross of Christ. Paul said, "**I do not frustrate the grace of God. For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain,**" Galatians 2:21. The law of Moses could not effect the righteousness of God in the soul; neither can any other system of works. We are bound to conclude that the social gospel theory is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures.

### **D. Not to create a superior organization**

Because churches as such, do not meet together, they are not organized into a separate and superior organization when their respective messengers meet for fellowship and business. **It is the messenger body that is organized in keeping with the Scriptural import of associated activities. The messengers must be subject to the churches; otherwise, they create a power outside their jurisdiction without Scriptural authority. If churches of a district should merge into an organization, they would automatically create a district super-church. If the churches of a state should merge into a separate body, a state church would ensue. If the churches of a nation should merge, a national church would emerge. If such should prevail throughout the world, the monstrous spectacle of a universal church would appear. That, in principle, would be a hierarchy.**

On the other hand, churches may compose associations, such as the Baptist Missionary Association of America and the various state and district associations of like principles. Though those churches, as such, do not meet and organize into a separate body, they may Scripturally authorize their respective messengers to meet as often as necessary to attend to business that is common to all who are concerned and united in concerted efforts according to a Scriptural declaration, or "Statement of Principles of Cooperation." Churches may associate by means of contributions alone, but the churches of such an association would likely be too loosely knitted and, therefore, too haphazard in their procedure. In order that there might be unanimity of purpose and plans and an effective operation, the churches should cooperate by means of messengers organized along Scriptural lines that "all things may be done decently and in order." When messengers meet and proceed with their business in accordance with the common agreement, they manifest an orderly cooperation of the churches as equal units in the association.

#### **E. To provide associated media for a world-wide promulgation of the gospel**

That complies not only with the Great Commission, but it is also congruous with reason. We should logically expect churches to associate, to pool their efforts in spreading the gospel in all the earth, for we know it would be utterly impossible for one congregation to accomplish such a stupendous task. The Antioch church of Biblical fame, after inaugurating a foreign mission program, soon saw a necessity of cooperation with other churches in order to maintain and widen her efforts, as upheld by the Apostle Paul. She earlier had seen a need for inter-church council and fellowship in order to iron out a bitter controversy that had arisen over a doctrinal issue.

The Scriptures support the effectiveness of associated work above that of individual or "independent" churches going. The principle of added strength in association may be seen in Deuteronomy 32:30. "**How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?**" Note the decidedly ascending ratio of power in association -- **one** putting to flight a thousand, whereas **two** in united effort are able to handle ten thousand. Nine thousand more are brought under subjection by the addition of only one other warrior. The two working together in the name of the Lord compose a company which can claim the presence and blessing of Christ (Matthew 18:19, 20).

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1. What is meant by the term, "**association**," when applied to inter-church work?
  2. Explain what such an association is not.
  3. Is an association of churches Scriptural? Give reasons for your answer.
  4. What things is an association not empowered to do?
  5. What are the powers of an association?
  6. Can an association, as such, meet? Why?

7. In what sense only can an association meet?
8. What is the purpose of an association?
9. List some things which are not within the purpose of an association.