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PRINCIPLES AND HISTORY

OF A

**Hundred Years of
Organized Work.**

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THE PRINCIPLES AND HISTORY OF A HUNDRED YEARS OF ORGANIZED WORK.

An Address Before the Century Celebration in
the Southern Baptist Convention at Hot
Springs, Ark., May 13, 1900.

A hundred years ago there were fifty or sixty thousand Baptists scattered along the Atlantic coast. They had one school. There were only the small beginnings of what we now have. If America has grown much, the Baptists of America have grown much more. They have grown by co-operation and doubtless might have grown more, if they had cooperated better.

I am to discuss the principles and history of a century of organized work. The task lies in two parts: First, the principles which have governed among Baptists in their work; and, second, the history of their efforts. The principles may be definitely ascertained. The history can only be outlined, so vast is its scope.

Two of the speakers before me referred to the part Baptists have taken in two historic conflicts for civil liberty. Washington bore testimony to the loyalty of the Baptists in the Revolutionary War. "Every Baptist," said he, "stood for the colonies." That is high praise. After the same manner have our brethren in

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Cuba borne themselves in the struggle for liberty on that beautiful isle. This is no accident. God's freemen must and do hate oppression. It is born in them. And this divine passion for liberty has had a moulding effect in the development of their denominational life. Liberty limited by law is the formula of all progress. Liberty without law is anarchy. The law of love has modified the actions of individuals and of churches. Pardon a personal allusion: When I was converted my whole course of life was changed. The church no longer seemed a prison, but rather a paradise. With all my soul I sang:

"Gathered into the fold!
With believers enrolled!
With believers to live and to die."

Nothing earthly seemed half so glorious. It was the working of the law of love.

The unit in the kingdom of grace is the redeemed soul. By the law of attraction renewed hearts are drawn together. There is an heavenly affinity which draws them and binds them together. Moreover, the spirit of love is the spirit of obedience. It is also the spirit of truth. Christians, without the divine command, would certainly have come together under the power of love to promote common interests. But they are not left without commandment as to organization. There is the divine law and divine model for organizing into New Testament churches. Every such body is a co-operative body with definite ends; it is the exponent of the will of its divine

head, and is as truly missionary as was the Christ in his life and in his death.

The ecclesiastical unit is a church, local or traveling. There is but one ecclesiastical unit, and that is a church. Also, each church is a complete unit, lacking nothing. "It is finished off at both ends, tucked in, and has no way to fasten itself to anything, or to tie anything onto itself." It is a complete organism—as much so as is a man. You can no more merge one hundred churches into one big church, than you can merge one hundred men into one big man. A church is a part of nothing. It is forever and under all circumstances and conditions a separate, complete, independent unit. Churches, therefore, do not belong to an association, society, or convention. They may affiliate through such bodies, but they can never become component parts of them. We do, indeed, speak of churches belonging to such and such an association or convention or society, as the case may be, by which is meant that they are of a number of churches affiliating through such body. Baptists when they speak of themselves always mean what they mean. The fathers who put the word delegate into the constitution of this great convention did not mean or believe that the churches could delegate their powers to this convention. They meant what they meant. Those early fathers were better on doctrine than they were on the dictionary, and a round lot of their children are, in this respect, like their fathers.

Each church being a complete organism, and each independent, it follows that each one, large or little, can do every act required to

be done by any church. It can ordain a preacher, call a pastor, baptize converts, observe the supper, discipline its own members, and take up a collection, all by itself. (A voice: "Or have a fuss.")

Yes, "or have a fuss." I go on record here and now as being unalterably opposed to belonging to any church that cannot have a fuss. Not that I like a fight, but I do love the liberty that makes a fight possible. The apostolic churches were of the free order. They could and did have their fusses. You cannot fail to see this if you read the Acts of the Apostles and the letters. And what is more, they had to get through with their fusses the best they could. There was no lordly bishop to rule them down. The early preachers had fusses. Even Paul and Barnabas fell out, and it got so hot they parted. It was about a man, too. There was no pope or bishop to take things in hand, so they had it out. We are certainly in the line of apostolic succession as to fusses, and this is one of the best things about a real New Testament church. It can explode and go to pieces. A church often grows large, runs down in religion, develops discord, gets into a big fuss, and goes to pieces; whereupon three or four new churches are formed out of the fragments, each better than the old one. It works beautifully. There may not be so much order as in some hierarchical bodies, but there is more life, and order is not the main thing, though it is a nice thing to have. Graveyards are orderly, but they are not powerful, nor desirable to be in. The right to have a fuss is

inherent in every true church, because a church is free.

These free churches are not, however, hermit bodies. They have a common charter, a common commission, a common work—the preaching of the gospel to every creature. Let us write it large: INDEPENDENT CHURCHES ARE JUST AS FREE TO CO-OPERATE AS THEY ARE NOT TO CO-OPERATE WITH EACH OTHER. Contrariness is not liberty, but a bad use of liberty. Isolation is not liberty. It is foolishness when co-operation is needed.

Blundering just at this point has cost Baptists a great deal. Tom Payne bore a noble part in the great revolutionary struggle. He wrote well against tyranny. He developed an abnormal idea of liberty, and he wrote the “Age of Reason,” to attack the Christian religion. When Payne had finished his manuscript he sent it to Benjamin Franklin and asked his advice as to printing it. Franklin was not a Christian, but he was a man of keen wit and a philosopher. He wrote on the fly-leaf: “Among the Hottentots, when a man becomes free he celebrates the event by whipping his mother. Among civilized people this is not deemed necessary.” The manuscript was returned to its author. Payne might have read a great lesson between the lines, but he lacked wisdom. The “Age of Reason” was printed, and the writer’s name is cankered by it. What multitudes of Baptists have celebrated their liberty by using it to hurt their brethren and to shame the cause for which all the free churches alike stand!

I come back to emphasize the great truth needful to be pondered by us all: INDEPENDENT CHURCHES ARE AS FREE TO CO-OPERATE AS THEY ARE TO REFUSE TO CO-OPERATE! What shall we do with our liberty? The solemn question ought to ring up and down the line until we find the fit answer.

In America, for more than a hundred years we have been ringing the changes on liberty. We need for another hundred years to ring the changes on the obligations growing out of liberty, and this ought to apply to church and to state alike. Liberty is a solemn thing. It is an awful thing to be free, and to carry the responsibility of freedom, for good or ill. Free people need to have sense and conscience. A free engine with throttle valve open on a railroad track is a dangerous thing where there are other engines. Again, I emphasize the truth that freedom means liberty to co-operate. The apostolic churches used their liberty to counsel together, and to co-operate in work, and to uphold sound doctrine. We may and will do so, if we are as wise as we are free.

In the formation of general bodies, associations, societies, and conventions, without exception, the foundation principle has been the independence of the churches. These general bodies have been formed to promote unity of purpose, and co-operate to carry out the great commission. They have recognized the independence of the churches and appealed to them for co-operation.

There are two views of general bodies in the world. According to one view the local bodies, through delegates, merge themselves into and

become parts of the general bodies. The large body has the same quality and is as large as all the small bodies. This is Romanism, modified more or less in the off-shoots of Rome. All these organizations are held to be ecclesiastical. The largest body controls all below it. According to the other view, the general bodies are in no sense ecclesiastical. They do not even smell of ecclesiasticism. The local bodies are not in them. The nexus between the churches and the general body is the individual messenger. Everything is voluntary. A church can send a messenger if it chooses. If it does, it is no more a church; if it does not, it is no less a church. It cannot delegate its sovereignty or any of its powers. Whenever churches get to sending their sovereignty to general bodies, it will get caught out some time and never get back. Rome came by that route. Baptists have, during all the past, held to the non-delegated theory. I repeat, they mean what they mean, and they never did mean that messengers are delegates in the stronger sense of the word. They have made this plain always.

The individual messengers go to the general bodies with no authority from their churches, and they return to their churches with no authority from the general body. If a messenger were to get lost coming or going, everything would go on just as it did before. There has, indeed, been now and then a man who has taken rather too large a view of his functions as a messenger, but there have always been enough plain Baptists at hand to reduce his conceptions to the proper dimensions. I have heard of a negro who, some time after the

civil war, was employed as a mail rider. Finding himself connected with the Federal government, he imagined that he absorbed and represented the dignity and sovereignty of the United States. Feeling thus, he became so "uppity" and self-important that there was no getting along with him. On one occasion a white man, not taking the view of delegated dignity entertained by the black man, took him by the nape of the neck and proceeded to shake the conceit out of him. As the shaking was proceeding the brother in black yelled out: "Hol' on dar, man! When yo' shakes me, you is shakin' de whole New Nited States Gub-berment." He was mistaken. In like manner, occasionally a messenger has imagined that he carried around with him the sovereignty of his church. But he didn't. Somebody might shake him out of his boots, and yet the local church would not feel the slightest vibration from the performance.

General bodies are councils. They open channels for co-operation. They are not missionary sources nor forces. The churches are the missionary forces and sources. The churches co-operate through the channels, provided they wish to do so. The convention can advise, and urge, and entreat, and persuade, but not command. To be entreated is not against the freedom of the churches. Every unmarried woman is free to marry or not to marry. But the right to marry carries with it the right to court, or to be courted. The woman who gets so "hoity-toity" that she can't be talked to about marriage, flies in the face of Providence, reverses the divine order,

and will be left to butter her own bread. She makes a foolish use of her womanly liberty. The right to co-operate carries with it the right to seek co-operation. This Paul did when he sent brethren to the church at Corinth, and wrote to them for a collection. Liberty is a much broader thing than many think. It is not exclusiveness, but affords wide opportunity for co-operation.

These co-operating, non-delegated bodies occupy a sphere to themselves. They do not impinge in the least upon the sphere or work or powers of the churches. They are not of the same grade or quality as the churches, and hence they cannot be compared to the churches in any way. Churches exist under an unchangeable, divine charter. Conventions exist severally under their own constitutions, which they severally make, amend, interpret, and enforce to suit themselves. But it does not follow that conventions are against the churches. They are not, for they are made up of members of the churches in general, sent by the churches to represent, not their sovereignty or power, but their sentiments and wishes. They represent with a fair accuracy a consensus of the opinions and wishes of the churches co-operating. Their actions are never binding, but are influential and strongly persuasive. Herein lies their usefulness. Under this arrangement we get all the advantages of co-operation without any of the dangers of centralization of power.

During the century just closing co-operative bodies have been variously made up as to messengers. The smaller bodies, such as dis-

strict associations, have usually been made up of messengers from the churches only; but these have not generally accepted, in full form, even the representative idea, for usually there has been a limit put upon the number of messengers the larger churches could send. In the larger bodies there has been usually a mixed basis, messengers coming from different sources, and the financial feature has been prominent. This is true of this convention, the greatest in the world. It has come to pass in this way that in the constitutions of all these larger bodies there is an open repudiation of all pretense to ecclesiasticism. There have been from time to time efforts made to put our great co-operative bodies on an ecclesiastical foundation, but it has not succeeded because the latent argument for it has been deemed unsafe. It squints too much toward ecclesiasticism, and Baptists will have none of that in conventions. Besides, conventions are only for co-operation in work, and to touch the working forces has been deemed the practical thing. I am not making an argument, but stating facts of history. Yet in this matter I have no quarrel with history for being what it is.

The God of Israel has been with us in the wilderness, and we see a demonstration of the truth of the Scripture: "The Lord preserveth the simple." We have blundered much and on many points, but never as to the true character of co-operative bodies.

I linger, before turning to the second part of my subject, to answer a few objections which have been argued against our free, no-government denominational polity.

Some are wont to say it is too weak for efficiency. I reply that it is as strong as our love for Christ and his truth, coupled with what grace and sense we have can make it. It lacks human authority, but it has in it divine authority. What is more than this is not strength, but weakness. It is an evil thing for any people to think more of human than of divine authority.

Second: It lacks system and order. I reply and order. We enjoy the liberty to adjust that it is capable of the most perfect system ourselves in a thousand ways, under the law of love, which would be quite impossible under a rigid ecclesiasticism. The New Testament does not contemplate co-operation in cold blood, but in love. The flexibility of the free system is its strength. We can change a method, amend it, and use it or discard it just as seems best on the spot. When a body loses vitality it can fall down and get out of the way, which is no small advantage. The dismay of Christendom to-day is, that the earth is covered with dead organisms which are so put together that they cannot fall to pieces. I will not certify the truth of it, but an old-time stage driver tells how he geared up his six horses so well that, though one of them died as he pulled out from one station he did not fall until the driver took the gear off at the next station. Alas, for Christendom, that the gear is never taken off the dead churches and preachers! With us there are saving possibilities of dissolution and "scatteration." We can go all to pieces, take the sound elements, reform the work and go right on. I have often thought how extremely

handy it would be, when rheumatism attacked a leg, if one could take that leg off and lay it aside until it quit hurting. We can do a thing like that with an unruly member of our co-operative work, and with great advantage.

Third: "The voluntary system tends to noise, confusion and strife," says the heirarch. It does not tend to these things, but it happily allows for them. For lively reading I commend you to the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles. When you get to acts anywhere there is some noise. The whirr of the buggy wheel is not the movement of the vehicle, but an incident of the movement. Railroad trains make a noise when they move, but none when they stand still and the steam is dead. Some very orderly denominations are like great trains with dead engines: sidetracked, silent and motionless. Better move, if they take the risk of running against something, and creating some noise and confusion. A whipped brother with a Presbyterian wife said to me recently: "I am so tired of Baptist fussing. The clatter reminds me of an old thresher running." No doubt he had been well drilled on order at home. I said, "Well, brother, order and quiet are fine things, if you want to sleep: but when the thresher is not making any noise it is also not getting out any wheat. We have been having considerable fuss recently: but don't forget that last year the Baptists gained more members than the other five largest denominations all put together. Let us not stop the machinery to save the noise." I hope he told his wife how things were going. The voluntary system is trouble-

some beyond doubt, but the doctrine of compensation holds. A healthy, new idea, turned loose in many sections will create consternation; but by the time the fight over it is ended, it has captured the people, and they are that much better off. That is the only way to enrich mankind with truth. The free system promotes enlightenment and depends entirely on love and light for success. We have not laid that great truth to heart as we should have done, and hence we have suffered for lack of education. The free system is all right; we only need to live up to it.

Let us turn now to the history of co-operative work during the matchless century just closing; matchless in progress, because matchless in its liberty and enlightenment. It is a Baptist century, for its hundred years have seen the unfolding of the principles contended for by our ancestors, from Peter to Jeter. The vast field lies before me, a continental landscape, covered with the glory of God. I can only delimitate it in broadest outline.

All the great successes of the denomination have been won by co-operation, through organized bodies. There has been now and then a dream in the minds of some of what would happen if churches would act separately; but it has never been much but a dream. The business has been done by cooperation, through organized bodies. These bodies have been formed under the free play of three great forces:

1. The love of liberty, and its correlative, the fear of centralized power.

2. The cohesive power of a common love, a common faith, and a common mission.

3. Free discussion, covering the whole ground of common interests.

These are a trio of matchless forces in forming denominational life. Let us note them in their order.

1. Love of liberty. It is deathless in the heart of every true Baptist. We know the price of it, too. We will not have any master but one, Christ the Lord. We have not loved liberty too well; but this universal passion of the free-born has been much abused by some. In its name they have done many foolish things, and refused to do many wise things. It has created a paradise for demagogues of a pestiferous sort within our own ranks. Whenever one of this order has wanted to build around himself a personal following, he has become at once the special champion of church independence, though every Baptist on the continent agreed with him on the doctrine. It is one doctrine that has not been denied by a Baptist in these one hundred years, but it has done service in many a fictitious war. When I was a boy one of my chief delights was to watch masculine bovines fight. On one occasion, with my brother, I ran myself out of breath to see what we thought was a great fight. To my grief we found one immense bovine bellowing till the earth fairly shook, driving his horns into a clay bank, pawing up the dust, and throwing it into the air. It was a great fight—with just one side to it. I liked it not. It was a waste of time and effort. In like manner have some fought one-

sided battles over church independence. Some have developed the independence of one church to run clean over the independence of other churches. Their notions had to be trimmed down to fit the true doctrine, and this required work and time. But with it all, every way, love of liberty has been a great cardinal, wholesome factor in forming all our co-operative plans. May it never grow less! But I pause to say that this priceless heritage, like saving grace, may be turned to lasciviousness, and so our glory becomes our shame, our strength our weakness, and our hope our despair.

2. The cohesive power of a common love, a common faith, and a common mission. This has mightily helped in forming plans for co-operative work, and in holding our people to them. We are Baptists. We believe in it. So far as I can see, there is no harm in being an out and out Baptist, but much good. Personally, I prefer a Baptist a little over, rather than one a little under. It is easier to train one down a bit than it is to grow him out after he dries. It is right to love all good people, and we do, more or less—sometimes less—but as a practical thing, we who have been “planted together in the likeness of his death” are closer together than those who have been sprinkled apart. It is no sin to love the great doctrines for which we stand against the world, the flesh, the devil, and the pedobaptist sects. A strong, healthy denominational life has been good for us in every way. A great many will not co-operate on general principles; but if the Methodists, or somebody else gets too assertive, you can

count on them to help stop such foolishness. But above all, the spirit of the Holy One is with those in fullest measure who stand in fullest measure for all the truth. A flabby, flaccid, denominationalism is an undoing thing. I am not now speaking of that arrant spirit which exhibits itself so often in dogmatic, unchristian abuse of all Christian courtesy, and which delights in the dogma of ugliness. My soul abhors it. Not that, but high-souled loyalty to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This has been the strength of our co-operative work. In our bones we have felt that there was something worth working for, something the world needs and can get through no other people. That's a Baptist, and he is a useful man. The world will never see his equal unless it is another Baptist. Shame on us that we ever fight each other—except when it can't be helped! To see the work the Master has put into our hands is enough to weld us together in one indissoluble brotherhood, to live and die under one flag, written across the folds of which, as the expression of our unity: "One body, one spirit; even as ye are called in one hope of your calling! One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism! One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all!"

3. Free discussion covering the whole ground of common interests. Baptists stand for this and have stood for it. Free discussion is the safeguard of liberty and the patron of truth. I am not good at poetry, but I have at great pains memorized four lines from an American poet which seem to me full of pith:

"I honor the man who is willing to sink
 Half his present repute for the right to think.
 And when he has thought, whether strong or
 weak,
 Will sink t'other half for the right to speak."

Such a man has the soul of a true Baptist in him. "Truth crushed to earth," I have heard, "will rise again." It will, if somebody will give it a lift. Not otherwise. Every inch of the world's progress has been won by discussion. Much, however, that goes for discussion is not discussion at all. It is a step below, and is just a plain fuss, with nothing to grace it or recommend it to decent and sensible people. The ocean waves purify themselves by their movements, but dabbling in the shallows only stirs up mud, and that has always been the favorite employment of some people.

In the progress of events, everything has passed the crucible of discussion. There have always been rabid men and some bad men. They have flooded the people with their notions. It has always been to their discomfiture in the long run; and, with a great people, it is the long run—not the short run—that counts. Error and lies have a brisk way of starting off, but their legs are short. They soon run their course, but always turn the corner in time to die at the right man's door. The century along the line of co-operative work through organized bodies has been a battle century. The great hardshell fight raged seventy years ago. The right won. But while the hardshells left us, a good deal of hardshellism remained, and

the hardshell bird has been laying eggs in the missionary nest ever since, much to our hurt.

The fight for colleges and seminaries as agents for the spread of the truth raged over the whole field, and is still on. We must finish the fight and finish it right, forcing the fighting to the remote districts along with the fight to finish hardshellism.

There has been a fight over the organization of the conventions and the boards as well as over the planting of all the colleges. We had a stiff fight, of a good sort, yesterday, over the new movement to elicit and combine our resources. We will have more as time goes on, no doubt.

Whoever reads the history of our struggles for a hundred years will have occasion to note that the battles have raged along one line. Baptists have an instinct for the Scriptures. "Thus saith the Lord," is the end of controversy. But much confusion of thought has arisen all along, because there was a lack of discrimination as to what belongs to doctrine and what belongs to method. The long drawn out battle over Sunday schools played backwards and forwards across this dividing line. So, on a lesser scale, the organ controversy; and so, on a larger scale, the board controversy. With the straw all threshed and the grain winnowed, it is simple. Teaching the Bible is a matter of doctrine; a Sunday school is a method of teaching. Singing is doctrine; an organ to help it is method. For lack of seeing this, a church in Texas recently split on a tuning fork. There was no Scripture for it. Co-operating in work by churches is doctrine.

A board is method—only a channel through which churches co-operate.

The conflicts of a century are nearly ended. What are the results? I summarize briefly. The great principles upon which the work is to go on have been discussed over and over, and to-day they stand approved by the vast majority of the nearly 5,000,000 Baptists in America. Some will assail them still, but with ever lessening effect. The chaff and the wheat have been separated, and the wheat is garnered in great imperishable memorials. Principles have been crystallized into institutions. They may be modified from time to time, but die—never. We have this convention, the northern societies, a convention for every state, one or more colleges for every State, our seminaries, our mission boards, or newspapers, and more and better, unity and spirit to support all these agencies for good. We have \$35,000,000 invested in schools. We have nearly 5,000,000 baptized people, white, black, red, yellow, all valuable for use in the Master's service. A hundred years of organized co-operative work come in solemn procession to-day and lay their garnered wealth in the lap of the new century. With tender solicitude they say, "Cherish this wealth, gathered from many hard-fought battlefields, gathered amid dust and blood and tears." Pausing a moment the new century turns her face from the past, and points us to a world open to the gospel, and says: "Possess the land. You are able under your king to do it quickly."

Here we are, the greatest body of baptized people on the earth. What shall we do? We

are free! What a solemn and awful thing to be free! That is why many will be lost: they are free, and use their freedom to their ruin. There are many vexing problems clamoring for solution. The biggest problem of all for us is ourselves. What will we do with ourselves? To narrow the problem, what will the million and a half of Southern Baptists do with themselves? We need to learn how to live together, how to use our liberty to edification, not to destruction. We need to quit our foolishness in wasting time and opportunities over trivial things. We need to get hold of ourselves, and turn ourselves from a drove of folks into a great army for God.

If we solve the problem of ourselves, and use what we inherit, we can solve the negro question, and the Chinese question, and the liquor question, and in time, all questions, as God leads us on.

Co-operating through organized channels now established, we may reach and help and bless every part of the world long before another century passes in review before some coming session of this body. Great God of Hosts, lead us on! And as thou hast blessed our fathers, bless us and our children, always more and more, as opportunities and responsibilities increase !

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