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WHAT IS THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF REGULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES?

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I. THE GARBC IS A COOPERATIVE FELLOWSHIP, NOT A COERCIVE CONVENTION

From their very beginning, the people called “Baptists” have manifested a willingness and a desire to work together at a common task. Baptists have always recognized that they could do things together that they could not do separately.

This Scriptural conviction has caused these people to stand together on the Mount of Vision and take stock of the world and its needs, then voluntarily and happily move on together to accomplish the task.

While this has been true, something else has been equally true. In working together at a common task, each and every church has been the sole judge as to the measure of its cooperation. No association or convention could ever, rightfully and Baptistically, compel a fellowshipping church to cooperate in any project, either in part or in whole. That must always be left to the sovereign will of the local church.

Certainly if the project were Scriptural and true to Baptist convictions, there should be no reason why each church would not cooperate. But it must never be compelled to do so, nor penalized in any way if it fails to do so.

Then came the day of “conventions,” “unified budgets,” and so forth. Then came the day when if a church did not cooperate, it was denied the right to a seat in the Convention. The basis of fellowship in the American Baptist Churches (formerly Northern Baptist Convention) today is not what one believes—but what one pays. Furthermore, the day has also come when many of the projects to which the Convention demands loyalty and support are no longer either Scriptural or Baptist.

The GARBC is a group of Baptists who together have stood on the Mount of Vision in these last days. They have looked out over a poor, broken, Hell-bound world. They have gazed with sorrow upon a professing church completely riddled with modernism. Looking at a lost world

and an apostate church, they have come away with a deep conviction that there is a place for united effort in the common task of (1) keeping a clear, undimmed picture of the true gospel before a lost world and (2) sounding forth the clarion call for the Scriptures to every born-again believer to separate him- or herself from the apostasy.

The implementation of this vision, of course, needs separated schools in which to train our workers and mission agencies through which our churches can become articulate in the missionary task. Naturally such schools and mission agencies must look to like-minded churches for support and cooperation.

In that sense, the GARBC does have a united vision and a common task. Because our purpose is absolutely true to the Scriptures and in conformity to the historic Baptist faith, there is no reason inherent in the project itself to cause a fellowshiping church to refuse to cooperate with it.

But here is the crux of the matter. In spite of what has been said above, no church *must* cooperate or lose its place in the Fellowship. No matter how good and right the “common task” might be, each local church is the sole judge as to the measure and extent of its cooperation. Baptist churches must always be left free to determine their own program. We believe the GARBC offers a Scriptural and Baptist program of advance and common interest, but each church is ever free to say how much it will help. There should be cooperation. There will be no coercion. The GARBC offers to all its churches a constraining motive but never degenerates into a compelling machine. It is not a dictatorship. It is a partnership.

II. THE GARBC IS A BLESSING, NOT A BURDEN

So often the congregation of a local church may feel tired, weary, and discouraged. The ground is so hard. The stones are so thick. The weeds are so high. The sun is so hot. As the church at a given location looks at its own field and corner of the vineyard, it is easy to say, “Let’s quit.” The burden is almost unbearable.

When that happens, it is a blessing just to straighten up, lean on the hoe handle, and take a good look around. The church sees another in the next field doing the same blessed job for Christ. The ground is just as hard; the stones just as thick; the weeds just as tall; the sun just as hot in the one field as in the other. But there, right next to them, is another faithful Baptist church that has joined hands with them in the common task of sowing seed, tending the garden, and reaping the harvest.

Furthermore, the church sees a row of these churches stretching all the way from the rocky coast of Maine to the sunny valleys of California. All of them are engaged in the same blessed task. Somehow the burden becomes a little lighter and the task a little more intriguing and challenging, and with a sense of renewed encouragement in the fellowship of service, the little local church bends anew to the task, thanking God they are not alone in the world. Indeed we can say, “What a fellowship, what a joy divine” as each church sees its sisters also “leaning on the everlasting arms.”

III. THE GARBC IS A DIVINE PLAN, NOT A HUMAN SCHEME

So often we hear it said that associations of churches are man-made and have no foundation in Scripture. This is not true. There is abundant evidence in Scripture that local churches, while sovereign in themselves, were nevertheless united in some kind of common and cooperative bond. The designation of “association” for such union, of course, is not found in the Scriptures. But the fact of such a union is found there.

There is striking evidence of such a union in fellowship among the churches of the New Testament. It is found in Revelation 1:11. The risen Lord is saying to John, “What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” Mark you, he was not to write seven books, one for each church. He was to write one book, and it was sent to seven churches.

This would indicate that it was important that each church should know the status of each of the other churches. Ephesus should know about Smyrna. Smyrna should know about Philadelphia. Sardis should know about Pergamos. Why? Because the churches were so united in a bond of practical fellowship *that what affected one affected all*. Evidently these were not seven local churches operating absolutely independently of each other, knowing nothing about each other and caring less! They were so closely related to each other that our Lord said, “One book will do for all.”

In 1 Corinthians 16:1, there is another evidence that there was some kind of cooperative bond between the churches of the New Testament. Paul declares that the “collection for the saints” was a responsibility that rested upon the churches of Galatia as much as upon the church at Corinth. He declares that the offerings should be already in hand upon his arrival so there would be no delay in getting their liberality to Jerusalem.

Once more we see this striking evidence of a practical cooperation among New Testament churches in 2 Corinthians 9:1–5. These verses are so important that the reader of this material should turn to them and study them. Paul is again dealing with the ministry to the saints. He reminds the Corinthian church that the readiness of their minds to help in this task was so well known that he really didn’t need to write to them. He declares he has even boasted of their liberality to the Macedonian church.

In spite of his confidence in and boasting about the Corinthian church, he says, “Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf [matter].” He does so in order that the Corinthians church “may be ready” and not be found unprepared and ashamed when Paul came with some of the Macedonian Christians. He closes his exhortation by declaring that he had sent some brethren ahead of him to “make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready.” This sure enough sounds like an Association of Regular Baptists engaging in a common task!

This union and fellowship of New Testament churches are seen again in the Galatian epistle. In Galatians 1:2, Paul addressed his one epistle to “the churches of Galatia.” However, there were many local churches in Galatia; each one of them was to have read to it a copy of the one Galatian epistle.

Here again we see the evidence that in New Testament days, while churches were sovereign, they did not live to themselves or by themselves. They had common interests and a common fellowship in those interests. The practice of churches associating themselves together in the common task is not man-made. It is a divine plan.

IV. THE GARBC PRESENTS AN EXCLUSIVE PROGRAM, NOT AN INCLUSIVE PROGRAM

The American Baptist Churches has an “inclusive program.” Its proponents say that since there are all shades of doctrinal beliefs in the Convention membership itself, then representatives of the various beliefs should be sent into the schools, churches, and mission fields of the Convention. The logic of that contention is unassailable. If the Convention is going to allow modernists at home, then logically it must allow them abroad. It is not fair to accept the modernist’s missionary money and then tell that person it will be used only to support a fundamentalist missionary!

When Duncan Littlefair of Michigan says that “God is a part of this world’s stuff,” and when he says, “Jesus Christ was not and cannot be God,” then by all means, if the Convention is going to be fair, it should send missionaries to the field who say the same thing. And that it has done!

The GARBC has no such program. Ours is an exclusive program. It excludes all who deny the Son of God and the Word of God.

V. THE GARBC IS AN ASSOCIATION OF HISTORIC BAPTIST CHURCHES, NOT AN ASSOCIATION PERMITTING INCLUSION OF UNITARIAN CHURCHES

The American Baptist Churches does just that. Dr. Littlefair and his supporting church, though retaining the name “Baptist” until a few years ago, have long since become Unitarian. Only a few years ago was their name deleted from the Convention annual. According to a letter from Dr. Littlefair, his church was removed from the Convention rolls, not because of doctrine, but because of nonparticipation in the Convention program.

Riverside Church of New York City, under Dr. Fosdick, became a church of like status. Dr. Fosdick says, “Of course, I do not accept that old-fashioned doctrine of the virgin birth, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Christ, and I know of no intelligent person who does.”

In spite of this shocking unbelief, these and similar churches are held in highest esteem and honor within the membership of the American Baptist Churches. The GARBC closes its fellowship rolls to any such church. We are not a conglomerate mixture of Baptists and

Unitarians and a little of everything in between! No church can unite in our fellowship unless it, by vote of the church, accepts and adopts our doctrinal statement.

Furthermore, no church, even though it is fundamental in all its own doctrines, can enter the Fellowship of the GARBC unless it has separated itself completely from any affiliation or association with any and all other groups that condone the presence of modernists and modernism.

The requirement of complete and total separation from any convention such as the American Baptist Churches is written into our constitution. It is our safeguard against inner strife. If a church, no matter how fundamental, is still “at home” in the American Baptist Churches, it surely would not feel “at home” in the GARBC.

VI. THE GARBC IS A MISSIONARY FELLOWSHIP, NOT A SELF-CENTERED GROUP OF CHURCHES

The GARBC expresses its missionary ministry through six approved and cooperating Baptist mission agencies. These agencies are all separate from any convention affiliation and operate independently as Baptist faith missions. They operate on the same faith basis as do the nondenominational faith missions. These agencies, however, in addition to the faith principle, add the designation “Baptist” to their mission name and thereby immediately restrict their field of resources to Baptist churches of like mind.

During 1986 and 87, the 1,594 churches of the Association gave over twenty million dollars for missions. In May 1988 our approved agencies had 2,617 missionaries and accepted candidates of whom 1,317 were foreign missionaries.

VII. THE GARBC IS A FELLOWSHIP THAT BELIEVES IN A TRAINED LEADERSHIP

The GARBC expresses its desire for a trained and godly ministry through seven approved and cooperating Baptist schools. The same relationship is sustained to these schools as is sustained to the mission agencies. In June 1988 there was a total of 3,478 day school and 475 part-time students.

VIII. THE GARBC IS A GROUP OF CHURCHES WITH A PASSION FOR SOULS

During May 1986–April 1987, over 18,800 people were won to Christ and baptized into local, Bible-believing Baptist churches. There was no fanfare and no great publicity, but in 1,594 churches, our pastors and people were quietly but faithfully at work winning the lost.