

## CHAPTER VI.

### *The inconsistencies, and the evils of Intercommunion among Baptists.*

I WILL introduce this chapter with an unquestioned

#### AXIOM—

**Truth is never inconsistent with itself.**

When we examine the **workings**, and see the **results** of a given practice to be inconsistent and productive of evil, we may **know** that it is not of, but against the truth, as it is in Jesus; and if we are honest we will be willing to give up the practice, however consecrated as a denominational **usage**. Baptist churches, with all their rights, have no right to be **inconsistent**, nor to favor a practice unwarranted by the word of God, and productive of **evils**. Under the inflexible law of “usage,” which compels the pastor to invite “all members of sister churches present” to the Lord’s Supper, the following **inconsistencies** and evils, exceedingly prejudicial to our denominational influence and growth, are practiced and fostered.

#### THE INCONSISTENCIES OF INTERCOMMUNION.

1. Baptist churches, that practice Intercommunion, have practically no Communion of **their own**. They have **church** members, **church** conferences, **church** discipline, but no **church** Communion; and, therefore, no scripturally observed Lord’s Supper. The Communion of such churches is **denominational**, and not **church** Communion.

2. Baptist churches that practice Intercommunion have no guardianship over the Lord’s Supper, which is divinely enjoined upon them to exercise. They have control of their own members to exclude them from the table if unworthy, but none whatever of others more unworthy who may come. Such churches can exclude heretics, drunkards, revelers, and “every one that walketh disorderly” from their membership, that **they** may not defile the feast; but they cannot protect the table from **such**, belonging to sister churches, so long as they do not limit it to their own membership.

3. There are Baptist churches that very properly exclude from their own membership all drunkards, theater-goers, dancers, horse-racers, and visitors of the race course, because they can not fellowship such practices as godly walking or becoming a Christian, and therefore, believe that they are commanded to purge the feast of all such characters as “**leaven;**” not to eat with them, and, yet, by invitation to the members of all sister churches, they receive the very same characters to their table every time they spread it.

“ILLUSTRATION I.—The church at C——— excluded a member for ‘**general hard drinking** and occasional drunkenness,’ because it could not eat with such. He united with the church at W——— the next month, for he was wealthy and family influential; and on the next Communion at C———, he accepted the urgent invitation of ‘courtesy,’ and sat down by the side of the brother who preferred the charge of drunkenness against him!

“2. The church at M——, excluded two members on the charge of adultery, for marrying contrary to the law of Christ; one having a living wife, and the other a living husband; they had both been legally divorced, not for the one cause specified, but it was generally believed that they deserted their respective companions that they might obtain an excuse for marrying. Three months after they both united with a church ten miles distant, and now never fail to accept the affectionate invitations of the former church to commune with it!”

4. There are multitudes—I rejoice to say nearly all our Southern churches outside the cities – who will not receive persons immersed by Catholics or Campbellites, Protestants or Mormons, because they do not regard them as baptized at all; yet by their open **denominational** invitations they receive all such – and there are many of them in the churches – to their table, as duly qualified.

“ILLUSTRATION I. The church at S—— refused to receive two Campbellites on their baptism. They offered themselves to the Sixth Street church, which received alien immersions, and whose pastor was an immersed Campbellite; were received, and they make it a point to accept the very pressing invitation of the church at L—— to commune with it!

“2. The church at H—— has several members received on their Mormon immersions. Her sister church at P—— repudiates such immersions as null and void, yet these very members never fail to accept her liberal denominational invitations. From **principle** and solemn duty she forbids all such as her **members**, but from **courtesy** invites all such, as **foreigners**, to commune with her!

“3. The church at A——, La., excluded two brethren for unchristian conduct, which disqualified them to eat with it. They joined neighboring churches, and that church, every time it communes and gives the usual invitation, invites those very brethren back to the table from whence it had so recently expelled them!”

Illustrations of the **inconsistencies** of this unscriptural practice could be multiplied, and many will suggest themselves to the reader. But any one of the above is quite enough for all who desire to be altogether right. The thoughtful reader knows that the Scriptures do not sustain a practice that is productive of such **inconsistencies** and destructive of church discipline.

#### **THE EVILS OF INTERCOMMUNION.**

Notwithstanding so many—the fast friends of Intercommunion—profess to see no evils attending the practice, still there are both **many** and grave ones, **which I can prove to those who grant that there are evils in open Communion with other denominations.** I propose to try the practice, in the first place, by the self-same arguments these brethren oppose to unrestricted Communion with other denominations. They will, perhaps, admit **the** force of their own arguments. Dr. Howell asserts, and he is indorsed by English Baptists, that open Communion involves the entire subversion of the divine constitution of the churches. I assert that:

**I. Intercommunion involves the entire subversion of the divine constitution of a church of Christ.**

The practice is based upon one or two theories; 1. That the members of one church are entitled to all the privileges and rights of all other churches; or, 2. That a church may, if it sees fit, grant members of sister churches the right to commune with it—a right that Christ, for wise purposes, has withheld. The first of these theories entirely subverts the divine constitution of the churches, completely destroying, as it does, their **independency**, which is a fundamental principle, since no church would have the direction of its own government or discipline, or the control of its own ordinances [see last chapter]. The second theory would equally abrogate a

fundamental principle of the constitution of a Christian church, which principle is that a **scriptural church is an executive body only**, and can not change **the least thing in the least respect**.

Dr. Howell and Dr. Jeter also urge this argument against open Communion, viz.:

**2. That it subverts the discipline of Baptist churches.**

I urge the self-same reason against Intercommunion—it utterly subverts the discipline of the churches.

I will adopt the very language of Dr. Jeter in his “Tract” (p. 51), using Intercommunion in the place of open Communion.

“This practice must proceed on one of two theories—either that every person [Baptist] is the sole judge of his qualifications for Communion, or that all the members of the intercommunion churches are entitled to come to the Lord’s Table. The first of these theories entirely abrogates church authority and discipline. Suppose a church adopting it should be so inconsistent as to **excommunicate** a refractory member, of what avail would be its action? The excluded member, differing from the church in judgment, and having the sole right to decide on his own qualifications for communing, would come to the Lord’s Table, and have a perfect right to come in defiance of the act of excommunication...If this theory is correct, church government is a farce and a folly...Suppose the other theory be adopted, and none but the members of evangelical [Baptist] churches be invited to the Supper, then what follows?...One church tolerates dancing among its members, and another does not. A member excluded from a given church for dancing may be consistently received into fellowship by a church tolerating the amusement. Now, could this member of a more lax church be received to the Communion in the church from which he had been expelled, without enfeebling its authority and discipline? It would be placed in the attitude of admitting to its Communion table members of other churches guilty of offenses for which it would excommunicate its own members. So long as [Baptist] churches insist on different conditions of membership, they can not practice open Communion [Intercommunion] without inconsistency, and a partial abandonment of discipline.”—*Tract*, pp. 51, 52.

I submit this argumentation for the benefit of all those who **can** see that open Communion with other denominations is destructive of church discipline, since precisely the same result follow; viz., those excluded from one Baptist church can unite with another, because our churches are independent, and can receive into, as well as exclude from their fellowship, whom they please, without consulting another church; and at the next Communion season of the excluding church, come right back to the table from which, as leaven, he had been excluded! This is a matter of constant occurrence among us.

How a candid Baptist can resist, or why he should wish to resist this argument, I can not understand.

If the argument is valid and of conclusive force against open Communion, which all our writers and all Baptists for ages have declared it to be, why is it not equally valid and conclusive against Intercommunion and must be so long as Baptist churches are independent organizations? This is a mountain evil, and its operations disastrous.

**3. Intercommunion is productive of bitter strifes, discords, and alienations between Baptist churches.**

It has ever been, and still is, continued at the expense of peace, good feeling, and fellowship of the churches. It has in every state of this Union, where the independency of the churches has been rigidly observed, alienated churches, distracted and divided the brethren, and seriously paralyzed the influence of the cause of Christ. During the past year alone, two churches in Middle Tennessee, and two also in West Tennessee, with all the surrounding sister churches that could be drawn in to take sides, have been distracted and alienated, and forced into

hostilities, because one church in each case, in the exercise of its scriptural independence, received into its fellowship a worthy brother, unjustly, in its opinion, excluded from the other. In each instance the excluding church is aggrieved, and protests at the act, since it compels it to observe its Supper as a **church** ordinance, or invite the excluded person back to its table, from which it had just expelled him as unworthy; and, rather than do this, the case is carried up to agitate and distract the association. The year before, the peace of three churches in Louisiana was destroyed, and the churches alienated for alike cause—one church having excluded two brethren, and these had joined two neighboring churches, and, with both of these, the excluding church was aggrieved, because by their act, they enabled those excluded persons to return to its table. Was it not, in fact, Intercommunion, and not independency, that produced these evils? For years past two churches in Talladega county, Alabama, have been alienated, and the association disturbed and divided for the same cause. In every case church independency is surrendered by the churches, and the association acknowledged as having ecclesiastical jurisdiction over them, rather than to give up Intercommunion, at best but an **usage** of the churches. Like difficulties are occurring all over the land, and have been ever since Intercommunion, stealing in unawares, became the practice of the churches. Who will say it has not been, and is not productive of evils—when, in so many places, the cause has for years been measurably paralyzed by it?

4. To Intercommunion may be traced a majority of all the Councils called to settle difficulties between churches, and of all the disturbances in our district associations, during the last fifty years. The difficulties have in one form or another, grown out of this practice, and would not have been, had our churches observed only **church** communion.

The Concord and the Central Associations of Tennessee were shaken to their centers by the discussion of the question that springs from this practice, viz: the right of one church to receive to membership a member excluded from another, because it **renders abortive the discipline** of the excluding church, since it can not invite the members of all sister churches to commune with it without often inviting her own excluded members. In the above cases the associations were called upon by the aggrieved churches to require the offending churches to exclude those members on pain of expulsion from membership in the Association. The trouble between those churches in Alabama distracted the Association for years, and disturbed the peace of its churches to the serious injury of Baptist influence and progress throughout the bounds of the body. Hundreds of brethren in that one Association can testify that the evils growing out of Intercommunion are not only many but grievous.

But these are not all or the worst evils of the practice.

**5. Intercommunion is perceptibly influencing our churches to surrender their independency itself, in order to protect their Communion tables.**

This is a portentous evil which is seriously threatening a speedy change in the polity of Baptist churches. During and from the apostolic period, potent influences, both from within and without, have been antagonizing and seeking to contravene the fundamental principle of absolute church independency. Ministers, ambitious of power and authority, have, from the beginning, antagonized it from within, and will to the end of time. The influence of powerful centralized religious organizations from that without operate upon our leaders to desire similar power; as the kingly forms of government, of the nations, did upon God's people of old, causing them to desire a king to lead them forth to battle.

Able advocates are now using the pulpit, press, and pen in the plausible advocacy of a “modified independency,” which they denominate the Interdependency of the churches, which

means that the churches must consent not only to be bound by the acts of ministerial councils and associations, thus making them virtually appellate Courts, but also consent that the disciplinary decisions of **one** church, however unscriptural or unrighteous shall bind every other church. We are startled almost weekly of late at hearing southern editors and writers deprecating absolute church independency, and indorsing the specious pleas for interdependency, which, to the knowing ones, means nothing less than the total abrogation of local church independency, and the substitution of a centralized form of government, which floats in their conceptions as “the denomination,” controlled by conventions, associations, and councils, the last analysis of which is hierarchism.

A Baptist minister was appointed recently by the Pastor’s conference of Philadelphia to prepare and read an essay on “Denominational Centralization,” which was adopted, I believe. He suggested the use of the word “Unification,” as less likely to arouse the watch-dogs of the churches. I will quote a paragraph from that essay, which now lies before me:

“The tendency of our denominational **thinking and working** is towards **centralization**; or, if you will suffer me to substitute a word which is less liable to be perverted, less **likely to arouse prejudice**, and which also more completely expresses the meaning of current movements, I will say that the tendency of present thought and work is towards **unification**.”

We are given to understand that these pleas for interdependence and **unification** mean nothing less than the utter subversion and abrogation of true church independency, and the substitution of a **centralized denominationalism** in its place, which is but another word for hierarchism—for the clergy invariably govern and control all centralized forms of ecclesiasticism. Now no more influential argument can be brought to bear upon the churches, one they can see and **feel**, than that by adopting the theory of church interdependency they can effectually guard their communion tables from the approach of their own excluded members!

Thus to support a manifestly unscriptural practice the divine constitution of the churches of Christ is coolly proposed to be abrogated! The sad fact is, that in many and large section of our country, especially in the northern states, this interdependency is already so generally and so practically accepted by the churches that, Baptists excluded from one church, however unscripturally and unrighteously, no other church will restore him to his church rights until the excluding church restores and commends him, thus indorsing the theory that the acts of one church binds every other church. Who will deny that a practice, the support of which demands not only the violation of the appointments of Christ but the abrogation of the divine constitution of his churches, is not a fearful evil?

**6. Intercommunion opens wide the door to all the ministerial tramps and impostors that pervade the land.**

They never fail to accept the invitations to commune, nor does the pastor fail to call upon them to administer one element, and thus introduce them into the fellowship of the church. It is needless to say that the church is disgraced in its own eyes and the eyes of the community when the exposure of these too numerous married impostors takes place. This is a crying evil.

7. It has encouraged tens of thousands of Baptists, on moving away from the churches to which they belong, to go without transferring their membership to a church where they were going, since they can have all church privileges—preaching and **communion**—without uniting with, and bearing church burdens. If Baptists could have no such privileges without membership, they would keep their membership with them, if, indeed, Christians and loving the church of their God; and if not it is more than well that they should not be members.

8. All the scandal heaped upon us as “close-communication Baptists,” with much of the prejudice produced in the public mind and fostered against us, has come from **Intercommunion**. Had our churches, one and all, limited their communion, as they have their discipline, to their own members, we should no more have heard of “close-communication Baptists” than we now do of “close-membership Baptists,” or “close-discipline Baptists.” We are suffering all this by our own inconsistency and departure from the primitive practice.

9. We annually lose thousands and tens of thousands of worthy persons who would have united with us, but for what they understand as our unwarranted close-communication. Our practice can never be satisfactorily explained to them as consistent, so long as we practice a partial, and not a general, open communion. Our denominational growth is very materially retarded by our present inconsistent practice of Intercommunion. If we practiced strict church communion, these, and all Christians, could understand the matter at once; and no one would presume to blame us for not inviting members of **other** denominations to our table, when we refuse, from principle, to invite members of other Baptist churches—our own brethren.

It is fiercely admitted by reliable brethren, who enjoy the widest outlook over the denomination in America, that for the last few decades of years the general drift has been, and now is, setting towards “open communion”—it is boasted of as a “broadening liberalism.” There are numbers in all our churches—and the number is increasing, especially in our fashionable city and wealthy town churches—who are impatient of the present restrictions imposed upon the table; because, not being able to divide a principle, they can not see the consistency of inviting members of **sister** churches, and rejecting those whom we admit to be **evangelical** churches, as though all **evangelical** churches are not **sister**; nor can they divine why Pedobaptist ministers are authorized to preach the gospel and to **immerse**; are invited to occupy our pulpits, and even to serve our churches as supply pastors for a season—all their ministrations recognized as valid, and yet they are debarred from our table. “They **work** for us, and we refuse to allow them to **eat**.” The only ground upon which we can successfully meet and counteract the liberalizing influences, which are imperceptibly bearing the Baptists of America into the slough of open communion, is strict local church communion, and the firm and energetic setting forth of our distinctive principles, as taught in God’s Word.

**Consistency.**—If each Baptist church had its own communion, with its own members, independent of all others, then each church could receive into membership, or exclude from membership, whoever it pleased, and no other church would have the shadow of a right to complain, or would be affected by it. On the one hand, the church excluding a person would have no power to prevent his uniting with another church that could fellowship him: and, on the other hand, the church receiving the excluded person would not, in so doing, restore him to the communion from which he had been cast out.

### CONCLUSION.

Now let the thoughtful, candid reader, in weighing all these specifications, especially consider the following before rendering his verdict:

1. If Christ originated his churches to be independent bodies, as all admit, would it not be reasonable to conclude that he appointed a symbolism, in some permanent and oft repeated ordinance, that would set this fact forth; that, so long as the churches rightly observed the ordinance, that would set this fact forth; that, so long as the churches rightly observed the ordinance, the centralization, interdependence, unification, or consolidation of his churches could never be effected? Have we not seen that the divine symbolism of the Supper does teach the absolute independency of the local churches, *i.e.*, that each church is complete in itself—has sole control of its ordinance—is alone responsible for its right observance, and, since it symbolizes church relations, that none but its own members can unite in its joint participation? I can but think that to

preserve his churches from centralizing tendencies and inevitable hierarchism, was one of the reasons why he guarded this ordinance with such fearful sanctions.

2. Is it not evident that the practice of Intercommunion involves the implied right, on the part of the churches, to change Christ's appointments, thus assuming legislative powers, and even assuming the right to abrogate and abolish Christ's own appointments? For, if Christ did appoint the Supper to be observed by each church alone, and, as such, the eating of one loaf to symbolize that all its participants are fellow-members of the one and self-same church, then to extend this privilege to others than its members, is to contravene Christ's appointment and to make void one of his ordinances by its traditions.

3. Let the thoughtful reader mark this fact, that Intercommunion must be abandoned if church discipline is to be sustained, or the independency of the churches given up and an interdependency adopted, practically at least, by which the acts of one church, however unrighteous, bind every other—thus precluding the possibility of an excluded person joining another church—and councils, associations, and conventions practically made courts of appeal, and the churches inevitably controlled by their decisions. But ministers control these bodies, ever have and ever will, and hence Intercommunion is the legislative parent of the hierarchy. If any one of these inconsistencies or evils is admitted, then

**INTERCOMMUNION IS UNSCRIPTURAL.**

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