



SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

BAPTISTS AND UNITY

TEXAS BAPTISTS
CHRISTIAN UNION
A DELIVERANCE BY THE BAPTIST
CONVENTION OF TEXAS

Texas Baptists

Christian Union A Deliverance by the Baptist Convention of Texas

The Baptist General Convention of Texas, assembled in the city of Dallas, November, 1913, taking notice of the wide-spread interest in Christian Union, and representing the views and sentiments commonly held among the six hundred thousand Baptists of Texas, goes to record as follows:

(1) We look with deep and sympathetic interest on the efforts now making throughout the Christian world to reunite the scattered and oft-time antagonistic forces of Christendom. We deplore the divisions that obtain among the lovers of Jesus, and many evils resulting therefrom. We long for Christian Union. We pray for it and will labor for it, on a scriptural basis; but we insist that it cannot and should not be secured on any other basis.

(2) We hold the immemorial position of Baptists, that all true believers in Christ as their personal Savior, are saved, having been born again; and this, without the intervention of preacher, priest, ordinance, sacrament or church. Therefore, we profoundly rejoice in our spiritual union with all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. We hold them as brothers, in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and heirs with us of life and immortality. We love their fellowship, and maintain that the spiritual union does not depend on organization, or forms, or rituals. It is deeper, higher, broader and more stable than any and all organizations. We hold that all people who believe in Christ as their personal Savior are our brothers in the common salvation, whether they be in the Catholic communion, or in a Protestant communion, or in any other communion, or in no communion. We steadfastly believe and hold that until one is born again, by the Spirit of God, into the Kingdom of Christ, he is not a Scriptural subject of baptism, and cannot of right become a member of Christ's church.

(3) We here declare our unalterable belief in the universal, unchangeable, and undelegated sovereignty of Jesus Christ. We believe that He is the rightful and only head and sovereign of His churches; that His Word and will, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is the unchangeable and only law of His reign, that whatever is not found in the Scriptures cannot be bound on the consciences of men; and that the supreme test of true, Christian discipleship is obedience to the will of Christ, as revealed in the Bible. This

is fundamental. Therefore, neither tradition, nor customs, nor councils, nor expediences can be allowed to modify or change the Word of God.

(4) We hold that religion is essentially a personal matter between each soul and God. Therefore, we deny all proxyship, sponsorship or deputyship in religion. We hold that each consciously responsible soul must repent, believe and be baptized for himself; and every soul must give account of himself to God. In this view, infant baptism and infant church membership are scripturally impossible, and constitute an impassable barrier to organic, Christian union. In like manner, also, do the changes made by some in the two Christian rites, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, perpetuate divisions made originally by gradual departures from the simple teachings of the New Testament. To change these two sacred symbols of Christianity is to empty them of their scriptural and meaningful content and teaching; and to pervert them so as to make them carriers of the most deadly heresies. We deeply deplore these hurtful and divisive changes, and stoutly declare that there does not exist today or ever did exist any authority or reason to change what was fixed by the authority of the great Head of the church. We stand with the scholarship of the world in declaring that baptism is immersion. To change it is to destroy it. Baptism stands in the wisdom and authority of Christ. All the changes for convenience or sentiment or for any cause whatsoever stand in the unwisdom and usurpation of men. By our loyalty to Christ, which we hold to be the supreme test of discipleship, we are bound to hold fast that which He established.

(5) Concerning the church, it seems to us that this is a divine institution; that it was not evolved from the changing conditions of society, but came from the mind of the Master; that it is an enduring institution, adapted as well to one time and one climate as another; that it is the custodian of the truth, to hold and teach it to the end of time and to all the peoples of the earth. A scriptural church we believe to be a body of believers who have been scripturally baptized and are covenanted together to teach and to do all things commanded by its divine Head. It is a scriptural body, with a divine constitution and mission, both of which are revealed in the New Testament. We believe that a church of Jesus Christ is a pure democracy, and cannot subject itself to any outside control, nor bend to a superior clergy. We also hold with unshaken confidence, to the age-long contention of Baptists, that there must be absolute separation between church and state; and that the right of civil and religious liberty is, in the sight of God, the inalienable and indefeasible right of every human being. We maintain that the divine constitution of a church of Christ cannot be changed in order to effect organic, Christian union. We maintain, further, that Christ's ideal of a church, with its democracy, and the high value that it puts on the individual, is of priceless value not only to preserve religious

liberty but to promote civil liberty as well. We are unalterably committed to the divine model of a church. On this point our convictions are settled.

(6) We believe that intelligent, personal conviction in religion is essential to strength in Christian character and to success in any form of Christian work. It must be the working force in any Christian union. Our souls abhor the thought of any union inspired by convenience, or by desire to save money. There is one thing worse than commercialized vice, and that is commercialized religion, for if religion becomes an economic question, it ceases to be Christian. We must therefore protest against the many cheap and cheapening methods employed to break down convictions, and to establish a mechanical union out of the *disjuncta membra* of the several denominations. To us it appears far more consistent and Christian, to appeal to the individual conscience to study the Word of God with openheartedness, and to follow the light that may therein be found. Any union founded on compromise and spurious appeal is a sham union, and will debilitate and retard the progress of Christianity the world over. Any such union must inevitably end in a wide apostasy, followed by inertia, indefiniteness, confusion and waste of spiritual force.

(7) Our message to our brethren of other communions is, that since the present divided condition of Christendom is unquestionably the result of departures from the simple teaching of the Scriptures, the only possible road to organic union is back to the Scriptures, fairly interpreted. If it be said that this is, in our present state, impracticable and impossible, we reply, that if that be so, then organic union is impossible with Baptists, for we are unalterably bound to the Scriptures as our law and guide. We speak on this point with absolute frankness and with great plainness, because we crave to be understood by our fellow Christians. We neither ask nor wish anyone to come to us, except upon a personal conviction, but would have all to study the Holy Scriptures to find the path of duty; and our confidence is unfailing that there is light sufficient in the Scriptures to guide us all to the Union the Master wishes.

We are not unmindful of the difficulties of the case. Rearing and traditions and pride of opinion are strong forces among all people. We do not claim perfection for ourselves. It seems to us that until we come to have one mind and one spirit concerning the things necessary to organic union, it would be Christian and becoming in all to frankly and freely urge all to study the Scriptures and follow their teaching, putting renewed emphasis on the unescapable duty of individual investigation and obedience. We would hope for much if that were universally done now, in the fairer and more fraternal atmosphere in which we live a condition for which we are profoundly thankful to Almighty God.

(8) Pending the working out of the problem of union, we are glad to say that we stand ready at all times to co-operate with all our fellow Christians and our fellow citizens, whether Protestant or Catholic whether Jew or Gentile, in every worthy effort for the moral and social uplift of all men in all lands. We would freely co-operate in all good works, limited only as follows:

Our most cherished beliefs, our deep sense of duty will not permit us to enter into any Federation, Council, or what not, that would in any way obscure the positions set out above, or hinder us in the full and free preaching of the whole counsel of God to all the peoples of the world. By our very principles we are automatically separated, ecclesiastically, from all other people, and we cannot help it, unless we stultify our consciences or renounce the truth, as we are given to see the truth, a course no Christian would wish us to take. We would look with great favor on the union of those bodies whose ecclesiastical polity and principles will enable them, conscientiously, to symbolize together. This would simplify the problems and constitute an important step toward organic, Christian union.

We beg to say this other word to our brethren of other communions. We cherish in our hearts a deep and abiding Christian love for all our fellow believers in Christ, whether in or out of other bodies, and gratefully rejoice in all that they are doing for the salvation of the lost of earth.

(9) We believe that in the present state of the question of Christian union, a frank and fraternal communication of views and sentiments, through the public press and otherwise, would be helpful. While we would maintain the usefulness and the right of discussion, covering the whole ground of differences, we would deplore any unfraternal and uncharitable discussion, tending to create strife and to inflame mere partisan zeal.

(10) We summon ourselves, our six hundred thousand fellow Baptists of Texas, our brother Baptists throughout the South, nearly five million strong, our fellow Baptists throughout the Nation, in England, and in all lands throughout the whole world, to renewed zeal in the propagation of those principles we all believe to be divinely given, to the end that humanity in all parts of the earth may come into its full heritage of truth, and through the truth, into that perfect liberty wherewith Christ makes us free.

This is an auspicious day for Baptists. It is a day when the whole world is turning toward democracy, both in religion and in government. Individualism is everywhere the battle cry of progress.

There has never been such a time for the free preaching of the simple messages of Jesus and His Apostles. Cumbrous ecclesiasticisms are falling away; only the simple truth as it is in Jesus can either interpret or satisfy the heart hunger of the multitudes of earth who have long been enthralled

by over government in church and state. The day for which our Baptist fathers waited and suffered and died has dawned. What they died for let us live for in a worthy fashion. The marvelous blessings of God are on us. The times we live in, the boundless opportunities before us, the insistent calls from every part of the world for light ought to move us mightily to redouble our energies and multiply our activities in the world-wide spread of the full gospel of peace and liberty. We would ourselves lay to heart and would commend to our fellow Baptists everywhere, the assuring and moving words of the Apostle to the Gentiles: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Amen.

(Signed)

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