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IS IT A SIN TO BE A BAPTIST?

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Is it a sin to be a Baptist? Apparently Brother Robert Walker, editor of *Christian Life* magazine, thinks so, or at least thinks it is a sin to *act* like a Baptist.

In his lead editorial in the May 1952 issue, he urges everyone to join him in this conclusion. His editorial, "The Sin of Evangelical Sectarianism," is in part as follows:

"We view with alarm the trend toward evangelical sectarianism. We are not talking about separation from apostasy. We are not referring to minor doctrinal interpretations in which thoroughly evangelical groups or denominations differ. We simply caution against the trend on the part of thoroughly evangelical groups to insist upon Baptists for the Baptists, Presbyterians for the Presbyterians, Methodists for the Methodists, etc. The promotion of these slogans in a day when evangelical Christianity needs the full strength of the unity of the Body of Christ may not yet have reached great proportions, but the fact that they have been launched poses a serious problem."

Mr. Walker then goes on to say that the last thirty years of a great victory has been won against the forces of apostasy in our churches and denominations. He admits there are still plenty of problems, "particularly as to the degree of separation." "But at least the enemy has been identified and isolated."

He then goes on to say, "No sooner had this coup been scored, however, than the dragon of evangelical sectarianism raised its ugly head. Logically, perhaps, money (since its love is the root of all evil) was the first issue on which errant groups went astray. In so doing, they called

upon their people to desert the very faith mission boards that had represented them on foreign fields. They urged their people to turn from the Christian educational institutions that had tutored their children in the truths of Scripture. Unfortunately, the tactics employed often have been so subtle that some Christian have not realized what actually has been done. The approach has not been direct—but oblique. The warning has not been, ‘Don’t give your money to X Bible Institute.’ Instead the approach has been, ‘It’s better to give to our own Bible Institute than to X.’”

Mr. Walker continues, “By whatever name it is called, this trend is a direct threat to the entire cause of evangelical Christianity.” “In a day when, as never before, the world is looking for a supernatural answer to its dilemma, evangelical Christian leaders would do well to set their sights above the lust of the flesh for personal power, which has given rise to this trend. Now, as never before, let us choose that more excellent way—the way of love for all of those in Christ that makes us one in Him in our united effort to witness His love for a lost world.”

This is an amazing editorial. Mr. Walker contends that anyone who insists upon “Baptists for the Baptists” or “Presbyterians for the Presbyterians” and so forth is engaged in raising the “ugly head” of the “dragon of evangelical sectarianism.” He then goes on to charge that two things are responsible for such a shameful procedure: first, “love of money,” and second, “lust of the flesh for personal power.” Surely we have come upon a great day in the history of the Christian church when to stand in the pulpit of a Baptist church and appeal to the membership of that church to support its own young men and women who have gone out to the field under Baptist mission boards is to be charged with “the love of money” and “the lust of the flesh.”

Surely we have come upon a great day in the history of the Christian church when a pastor is to be accused of raising the “ugly head of evangelical sectarianism” because he suggests to his young men that if they are going to be Baptist pastors or Baptist missionaries, it might be well for them to take their special training in a school where they can be taught not only what a Baptist church is but how to sanely conduct one. And the same goes for the Presbyterians, the Methodists, or any other denomination.

If there is to be a Baptist church, or a Presbyterian church, or any other kind of a church in a given community, what is the particular sin in desiring that the pastors of these respective churches and the members of the same know what they are and why they are?

This writer knows of no one who has called upon denominational churches to “desert” the faith mission boards or the undenominational educational institutions. The inference in Mr. Walker’s editorial is that when we suggest that a Baptist pastor should have some Baptist training or that a Presbyterian pastor should have some Presbyterian training, we not only set our sights on “the lust of the flesh for personal power,” but we prove to the world that we do not love our brethren in Christ who are in these faith missions and undenominational schools.

Have we come upon a day when for one to be *for* Baptists, he must be considered as being against everything and everybody else? Just because a Presbyterian holds to his Presbyterian views, is he therefore to be marked off as a lust lover and a hater of all others? It is right at this point that Mr. Walker makes one of his most serious errors in an editorial that is filled with errors. He declares, “This trend is a direct threat to the entire cause of evangelical Christianity.” He says, “At a time when evangelical Christianity needs the full force of its testimony directed at the common enemies of the Gospel of Christ, such a trend can do nothing more than decimate its strength.”

Church history will not support Mr. Walker’s contention. The days when the Church of Jesus Christ made its most tremendous impact upon human society were the days when each denomination stood clearly on its own doctrinal basis, held rigidly and clearly to its own position, and yet withal had a clean, healthy, Christian respect for all other evangelical denominations. It is not at all inherent in the issue itself that to be a good Baptist, one must be a poor Christian in his attitude to all other evangelical denominational groups.

This writer remembers as late as sixty-five years ago when he entered the ministry, all evangelical denominational bodies honored and respected each other for their insistence upon the saving fundamentals of the gospel. This attitude was maintained in spite of the differences in church polity and practices. Those were days when all evangelical churches had far more power than they have now.

It is therefore quite evident that the lack of power in evangelical Christianity today is not due to “the sin of evangelical sectarianism.” If it didn’t weaken the church in the days of its greatest manifestation, why should it do so now?

The thing that has weakened the church is the curse of a godless modernism, and the cure for that is not some kind of loving undenominationalism, but a forthright dealing with the sin of apostasy in each denomination and by each denomination.

During the twenty-nine years that have elapsed since Mr. Walker wrote his editorial, the philosophy that he expounded has become widespread. In fact, it has even invaded some of our Baptist churches.

Too frequently we find churches where a small minority group insists upon less emphasis upon Baptist causes and more upon interdenominational causes. Sometimes this insistence becomes so vocal and pronounced that the church is torn by strife and discord.

No doubt these interdenominationalists are honest and sincere in their convictions and contentions. What seems so strange is that they are not consistent in their conduct. If they really believe in interdenominationalism, why do they not place their membership in an interdenominational church? These are no doubt born-again Christians. As such they are attracted to our GARBC churches because of the true ministry of the Word that they find there. The disagreement seems to arise when the pastor and boards suggest that we have a very special responsibility to our own Baptist mission agencies, our own Baptist schools, and our own Baptist young people who are trained, accepted, and waiting only for funds to take them to the ends of the earth. As we write now (1985), there are nearly 346 of them waiting!

Again we should ask, “Is it a sin to be a Baptist (especially in a Baptist church)?”