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THE NECESSITY FOR THE FORMATION OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF REGULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES

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The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches was formally organized and launched in May 1932.

The necessity for the creation of a new Baptist body in this land was abundantly evident then. Every passing year has added evidence that the creation of such a Baptist body was not only justified but wise. We here set forth the reasons why it was necessary to withdraw from the Northern Baptist Convention (now the American Baptist Churches) and proceed to setting up this new Fellowship.

I. THE BIBLE PREDICTS THE COMING OF AN APOSTASY

By apostasy we mean a falling away from the faith and a denial of the “faith once delivered to the saints.” The Bible contains many prophecies of such an apostasy, but we would direct your attention specifically to the prophecy of Jude. In the third verse of his epistle, Jude exhorts us to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” This exhortation constitutes a prophecy of coming apostasy—the exhortation to contend earnestly for the faith could be predicted only upon the fact that there would be someone who would be contending against it. One does not need to contend for a thing unless someone is contending against it.

Perhaps we should be clear in the matter of definitions at this point. Just what does Jude mean when he refers to “the faith once delivered”? The “faith” referred to here is not one’s personal faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. That is included in it, but it does not exhaust it. The “faith” referred to here is that great, central body of doctrine that constitutes the truth in all of its aspects. It is the same thing to which Paul referred when he said, “I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith.” Paul had kept not only his personal faith in Christ as his Savior, but he had kept that *great body of faith* that had been revealed to him in the form of doctrine.

There are matters revealed in the Scripture on which there can be no diversity of opinion. Here is just a handful of doctrines upon which there can be no basic difference of opinion and still be Christian.

1. The eternal deity of Jesus Christ

2. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
3. The sinless life of Jesus Christ
4. The substitutionary and atoning death of Jesus Christ
5. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ
6. The verbal inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God

These six great cardinal truths constitute the hard, central core of Biblical doctrine that must be accepted in order to be a Christian. We hold that no one can be a Christian and deny Christ's deity and virgin birth. We hold that no one can be Christian and deny His sinless life. We hold that no one can be a Christian and deny His atoning death. We hold that no one can be Christian and deny His bodily resurrection. We hold that no one can be a Christian and deny the verbal inspiration and authority of the Word of God. Denial of any of these immediately puts a person outside the boundaries of that which the Bible calls Christian. These are the very beliefs that constitute one a Christian. If one denies basic beliefs that make him a Christian, how then can he be a Christian? It is this body of Christian doctrine that Jude declares is going to come under such violent attack that it will be necessary for those of us who believe it to add a fourth proposition to our relations to it. We have *believed* it; we have *loved* it; we have *preached* it. Now, under the circumstances, we must add a fourth proposition—*we must contend for it*.

II. THE BIBLE DESCRIBES THE APOSTATES

One stands aghast as he reads this terrible description of the men who will be the architects, engineers, and propagators of the prophesied apostasy. Here is the astounding list as it comes from the inspired pen of Jude: "Certain men," "ungodly men," "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness [immorality]," "denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ," "filthy dreamers," "brute beasts," "clouds without water," "trees fruitless and twice dead, plucked up by the roots," "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame," "wandering stars," "murmurers," "complainers," "praisers of other persons for advantage," "mockers," "sensual." Well, there it stands in all its bald ugliness! It is not a pretty picture.

III. THE BIBLE LOCATES THE APOSTATES

Having prophesied the apostasy, having described the apostates, Jude now proceeds to locate the apostates for us. You will find it in verse 4. He locates them as being inside the church of Jesus Christ. Time was if one wanted to hear the blood of Jesus Christ laughed at, to have Jesus Christ Himself made the illegitimate son of Mary and the Bible made into a comic strip, he had to wait until a Tom Paine or Bob Ingersoll came to town and rented a hall across the street from the church, and then pay fifty cents to go in and hear a professional infidel. Jude here declares that the day will come when that will no longer be necessary. He declares that the deniers of the truth will have taken up their position inside the church itself! They will be found there in the persons of pastors in pulpits and teachers in seminaries and Christian-endowed colleges. From these vantage points they will out-Paine Paine and out-Ingersoll Ingersoll. We shall produce quotes from some of these "certain men" that we honestly believe would never have fallen from the lips of even a Bob Ingersoll.

IV. THE APOSTATES IDENTIFIED

The question now arises, Have the apostates described by Jude arrived? Have these “certain men” moved into the church of Jesus Christ or are they still to come? If they have not yet arrived, then this prediction in Jude is nothing more to us than an interesting bit of prophecy to be studied as we would study the Millennium, the Antichrist, or the forthcoming Tribulation. On the other hand, if these “certain men” have arrived and gone to work, then it is no longer a matter of prophecy; they are actually here, and we must do something about it. If it is merely prophecy, then it will be for our children or our children’s children to have to face the issue; but if it is now an actuality, then it is necessary for us to face this issue and deal with it.

It is therefore important that we take a survey of the situation, particularly as it relates to our own Baptist fellowship, and see whether or not the apostates predicted and described by Jude have actually arrived. It will be impossible for us in the compass of this small article to deal exhaustively with this matter, but we shall present sufficient evidence in the form of documented quotations to prove the fact that these men have arrived and are now carrying on their operations within the church of Jesus Christ. We shall deal with it especially within the American Baptist Churches.

In the presentation of these quotations we will gather them from Baptist leaders over many years and also bring them right up to date. Our purpose in this will be to show that this thing called modernism is no new thing within the ranks of the people called Baptists. It is no longer just a few seed acorns that have been dropped in the soil here and there. It has grown to a mighty forest of sturdy oaks and cannot now be removed.

Quotations

Gerald Birney Smith, *Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, page 493: “We have our own problems to face and we must use the Bible, and where necessary modify it, so that it meets these problems.”

Professor George Durant Drake, *Problems of Religion*, page 270: “Obviously untrue are many of the Biblical statements. In the Buddhist scriptures are many passages more truly inspired than the less-inspired part of our Bible.”

Professor George Burman Foster, *The Contribution of Critical Scholarship to Ministerial Efficiency*, page 740: “Man is the Book’s judge—the Book is not man’s judge.”

Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, professor in Crozier Theological Seminary, in his book *Christian Beginnings*, leaves barely the covers of the Bible in the hands of the believer.

Dr. Nels Ferre, a faculty member of Andover-Newton Baptist Theological Seminary, says: “God wants us to write even better Scriptures both in life and books.” In his book, *The Christian Understanding of God*, page 191, Dr. Ferre says the truth of the conjecture that Jesus was born of Mary fathered by a blond German soldier cannot be denied. It happened to other girls; why not to Mary? We would remind our readers that among the descriptive phrases used by Jude in

reference to these apostates is the statement that they would turn the grace of God into immorality and that they would be filthy dreamers. Here is the fulfillment of that prophecy! Jesus Christ is the grace of God in person. Dr. Ferre says it cannot be denied He was produced by the accident of immorality. If one can conceive a filthier dream than that, his mind must indeed be reprobate.

Quoting Dr. Ferre further from his book, *The Christian Understanding of God*, page 186, we read that we have no way of knowing that Jesus was sinless. He says, "Such a claim is irrelevant to the reality of the Incarnation, and such a proposition would, for that matter, depend mostly upon some literal claim in the Bible. Such claims there are but the Bible used in this external manner becomes a distinct danger to living faith." He then proceeds to imply that Jesus ought to have been an exceptionally good man because He had no wife to please, no property to take care of, and no corporation boss to whom He had to report!

Quoting from another book by Dr. Ferre, namely, *The Sun and the Umbrella*, from page 39, we read, "The use of the Bible as the final authority for Christian Truth is idolatry." On page 40 Dr. Ferre says, "Jesus may have been misled, as well as helped, by His use of the Scriptures."

Still another instance of the presence of these modernists within the church of Jesus Christ is found in the person of missionary Dryden Phelps, who for many years was a missionary under the American Baptist Foreign Board in China. In a book entitled *Jesus*, which he wrote jointly with other missionaries, Mr. Phelps says: "It was perhaps 20 years or more after Jesus' death that His friends began to put into writing as accurately as they could recall what He had said and done. The writers sometimes added their personal interpretations of events." On page 1 of the introduction to this book, Mr. Phelps says, "Jesus' father was a Jewish carpenter called Joseph; His mother's name was Mary." Later on in the book, Mr. Phelps says: "The crowd believed that the evil spirits had gone from the man now healed into the pigs. A possible explanation is that the men who looked after the pigs joined the crowd watching Jesus, and that the pigs were frightened by some of the people."

In the November 1950 issue of *Soviet Russia Today* appeared a letter from missionary Dryden Phelps as he wrote from China, which was under Communist domination. He said: "We are having the thrilling experience of reorganizing every phase of our university life of Chinese society. It is the most profoundly religious Christian experience I have ever been through. I absolutely believe this to be the most comprehensive renaissance the human spirit has ever experienced, and the most dynamic change in human history. God is working alongside of these Communists."

In 1936 when Mr. Phelps was home, he stated to the Foreign Board at that time that he was not "sure of the virgin birth of our Lord." He doubted that it was in the original writings. In spite of this he was returned to the field and remained there until late 1951. The book entitled *Jesus*, where he denies the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of our Lord, and the inspiration of the Bible, was written in the early days of his missionary service. Dr. Phelps became the pastor of a church in San Francisco known as the Fellowship of All Peoples. His assistant was a young Unitarian student. The hymnals were the official hymnals of the Unitarian church. The church is in close fellowship with the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco.

We quote now from home missionary Myron J. Hertel, who received his training at Andover-Newton Baptist Theological Seminary. A few years ago he was up for ordination in Boston, Massachusetts. The question was asked him, "What do you believe about the blood of Jesus Christ?" Mr. Hertel replied, "The blood of Jesus Christ is of no more value in the salvation of a soul than the water in which Pilate washed his hands." Immediately after this blasphemous statement he was called by the American Baptist Home Mission Society to superintend the Boston Baptist City Mission.

From Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a retired pastor of a Convention church, we quote from a letter written to an inquirer in 1945 in which he says, "Of course I do not believe in the virgin birth or in that old-fashioned substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, and I do not know any intelligent person who does."

We quote again from the former president of the American Baptist Churches, James Franklin. On page 35 of this book, *The Never Failing Light*, he says: "What was the cross to Him? Naught but an incident in the life which He had already laid down for His kind."

We quote again from Dr. A. S. Hobart, formerly professor of Crozier Theological Seminary. On page 29 of his book, *Translated Truths from Romans*, he says: "I cannot see anything understandable or acceptable in the theory that my guilt and my penalty were placed upon Christ, or that Christ's holiness is imparted to me in any way that involves a substitution of His holiness for mine, or His suffering for what was due me. That view of the theory of the atonement finds no foothold in my consciousness or my reason."

We quote from Dr. Henry Vedder, who was also a former professor of Crozier Seminary. He says: "Of all the slanders that men have perpetrated against the Most High, the doctrine of His substitutionary atonement is positively the most impudent and the most insulting. Jesus never taught and never authorized anybody to teach in His name that He suffered in our stead, and bore the penalty of our sins."

The editor of the Sunday School lessons for the American Baptist Publication Society of January 1933, dealing with the Temptation of Jesus, said, "Naturally after Jesus' conversion, He faced His life's work seriously."

Later in 1938, dealing with the same subject, a new Sunday School editor said, "Jesus along with Timothy and Samuel were pictures of evolutionary conversion."

True, some of these men we have quoted are no longer living, but when they were alive, they were members in good and regular standing in Baptist churches and ministers and teachers in accepted and approved Baptist seminaries and churches and were never repudiated by these bodies. Their kind did not pass from the Convention with their death, for men are still in the Convention who preach and teach the same blasphemies.

Rev. Duncan E. Littlefair, pastor of Fountain Street Baptist Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1946 was cohost pastor, with the Michigan Baptist State Convention, to the American Baptist

Churches. From his published sermons that he delivered in his own pulpit, we quote: “God is a part of this universe. God may be identified as a piece of this world’s stuff.” “He is a part of a great whole, and as such is constantly being broken and destroyed and frustrated. There is no reason whatever from the nature of God to assume that God is the strongest or the biggest in the universe, or that He can exercise His will at will.” “I want to say here this morning, once and for all, if I haven’t said it before, and if I don’t say it again, that Jesus Christ is not and cannot be God. This is idolatry. He was God in the same way that you and I may be God.”

It is true that ties between the Convention and Fountain Street Baptist Church were severed. However, for more than sixteen years such blasphemies from Dr. Littlefair as those quoted here went unchallenged. The church has had liberal, Bible-denying pastors since 1897. Yet the church continued its official connection with the American Baptist Churches from the founding of the Convention in 1907 until about 1960.

It is useless to continue longer in quoting these Baptist modernists, even though that is easily possible. We would like to turn now for a quick look at some of the importations of the Convention officials. One of the favorites of the American Baptist Churches is Dr. George Buttrick, formerly pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York City and now at Harvard University. Dr. Buttrick was also a president of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, now the National Council. Dr. Buttrick was the speaker at the devotional sessions at the 1948 Convention held in Milwaukee. Later he was one of the teachers at the Green Bay Youth Conference, and in 1950 when the American Baptists and the Disciples of Christ were meeting at the same time in Chicago and engaged in a union communion service, it was none other than Dr. George Buttrick whom the Convention leaders secured to deliver the “holy communion” message. We quote from Dr. Buttrick’s book entitled *Christian Fact and Modern Doubt*. On page 162 he says: “Probably few people who claim to believe every word of the Bible really mean it. That avowal held to its last logic would risk a trip to the insane asylum. . . . We should frankly admit the bankruptcy of literal infallibility, and under guidance of the facts, set out on the long, hard quest for the truth.” On page 284 of the same book, Dr. Buttrick begins his chapter on “The Future Life.” From that chapter we quote: “The future is hidden; we must be faithful to our ignorance. Jesus apparently conquered death, but we do not know. Why pretend we do? . . . We covet the chance to say to God hereafter, if God there be, ‘Lord they told us to grab the present gain, but there was more gain in staking life on a grand Perhaps.’ ” Here is a man, who, according to his own statement, is not sure that there is a God; if there is one, he wants to speak to Him about a certain matter. And yet he is a popular importation among Baptists.

Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam is another instance of the importation of modernists into the Baptist camp. At the American Baptist Churches’ annual meeting in Boston a few years ago, Dr. Oxnam was one of the announced program speakers. In his book, *Preaching in a Revolutionary Age*, page 79, Dr. Oxnam says that a God Who would punish sin, as He is described as doing in the Old Testament, is a “dirty bully.”

Evidence lies all around us of the welcome that is held out in Convention circles to the deniers of our Lord. Time and space in this article will not permit an extensive array of such incidents, but we cite one that took place a few years ago. According to a report in the *Oakland Tribune* of

January 29, 1956, Rabbi William Stern delivered the annual Jewish Chatauqua Society lecture at the Berkeley California Baptist Divinity School on January 25. The National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods sponsored this series of lectures at this Baptist school. Rabbi Stern is of the most liberal section of Judaism and of course is unitarian in his theological beliefs.

We believe that the above quotations and observations are sufficient to establish our charge that the prophesied apostates of the epistle of Jude are now at work within the framework of the church of Jesus Christ. And now we move to our conclusion, which will deal with obedience to the Scriptures.

IV. THE BIBLE COMMANDS SEPARATION FROM THE APOSTATES

And what saith the Scriptures?

In 1 Timothy 6:3–5 Paul instructs Timothy that if any man does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is a certain procedure to be carried out in respect to him. That procedure is found in the closing clause of verse 5: “from such withdraw thyself.” By no stretch of the imagination can this be made to read, “Form an association of Bible-believing Baptists and stay right there in the Convention in fellowship with them.” There are not enough letters in the word “withdraw” to spell the words “stay in and clean it up!”

In 2 Timothy 2:17–24 Paul is saying that certain modernists by the name of Hymaneus and Philetus have come in and have erred concerning the truth, especially on the doctrine of the resurrection, and by their own error they are overthrowing the faith of some. Timothy is then instructed by the apostle Paul that believers should purge themselves from these false teachers if they want to be indeed vessels unto honor, cleansed, and meet for the Master’s use.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14–17 we read that we are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers; we are to come out from among them and be separate. In Romans 16:17 we are told that we are to mark them who cause *doctrinal* divisions among us, and that having marked them, we are to avoid them.

Here are plenty of Scriptures that constitute the Biblical command for the believer to separate himself from the unbeliever. He is to withdraw; he is to purge; he is to come out; he is not to be unequally yoked; he is to mark and avoid.

It was in the face of such Scriptures as these that it was found necessary to form a new Baptist fellowship. From 1920 to 1932 some of us stood shoulder to shoulder with stalwart fundamental giants as W. B. Riley, John Roach Straton, and others in an endeavor to cleanse the old Convention of its modernism. Twelve long years of fruitless battling proved that this was not going to eventuate in victory, and, having proved that, there was only one thing left to do. If the modernists could not be removed from our household, then we must remove ourselves from the household. This was the explicit command of the Scripture. This and this alone created the necessity for the formation of a new Baptist fellowship, free from the presence of modernists and

modernism. Thus the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches was formed and for fifty years has been moving on under the blessing of God.