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THE POSITION OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF REGULAR BAPTIST CHURCHES ON SEPARATION

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First of all, what saith the Scriptures on the matter? First Timothy 6:3 and 5 says, “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness^[s] . . . from such withdraw thyself.”

Second Chronicles 19:2: “And Jehu . . . said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.”

Second Timothy 2:17–19: “And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

Second Corinthians 6:14–17: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God. . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.”

Romans 16:17, 18: “Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

Second Thessalonians 3:6: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.”

Second John 10, 11: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”*

These and other Scriptures constitute a mandate not subject to option, modification, or compromise on the part of the believer. The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches stands upon these verses in this matter of separation. These Scriptures forbid (1) organic union or cooperation with *unbelievers*; and (2) organic union or cooperation with *believers* who insist upon and practice such union with unbelievers. The “brother” who will not separate is involved in these Scriptures also. (See 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 2 Chronicles 19:2.)

The GARBC constitution stipulates that a church entering its Fellowship must not only be sound in the faith but must also withdraw all fellowship and cooperation from any convention or group which permits modernists or modernism within its ranks. We do not permit dual fellowship or “membership,” as it is sometimes called.

There is, however, a phase of separation that needs to be more clearly understood. That phase has to do with our relationship to and attitude toward others who differ. Just where *does* the Association stand on the matter of cooperation with individuals, churches, and groups outside its own fellowship?

Scores of times across this continent the question has been somewhat as follows: “There is a Baptist church in my town that still belongs to the American Baptist Churches. The pastor is a sound, godly man, preaching the gospel and winning souls. How far can I, as a GARBC pastor, and my church, as a GARBC church, cooperate with this man and his church? For instance, would I be violating the principles of the GARBC if I engaged in a two-church union evangelistic campaign with him or encouraged fraternization among our young people?”

The answer has always been about as follows: “That depends entirely upon the man and his church. If the man is perfectly content in the old Convention and has no notion of withdrawing; if he realizes there is something, even quite a bit, wrong with the Convention but believes it is not enough to worry about; if he holds that he can stay in with his membership statistics adding up in Convention totals while he judiciously ‘designates’ church funds to ‘good’ missionaries in the Convention; if he holds that we were unwise in withdrawing from the Convention and is critical of our present position; if he intends to maintain status quo, then we do not know how you could logically have such church fellowship or cooperation with him, for cooperative efforts would seek to build up and strengthen a *Convention* church and weaken your own. Your young people would be inclined, in some cases, to go to their summer camps, where they would be under influence and teaching that, in many Convention camps, is anything but true to the Word. This would all militate against your own separated position.

“On the other hand, if this brother is thoroughly aware of the Convention situation, is heartsick concerning it, and is slowly, carefully, and wisely releasing information concerning its apostasy to his church; if he is thus seeking to inform his membership with the express purpose that someday, a few months or even a few years later, he and his church will intelligently and forthrightly walk out of the Convention, and it is his full intention to do so, then by all means there not only could be but should be fellowship and cooperation with that brother and his church. *A man like that and a church like that are the very ones the GARBC is out to help.*

This answer has been submitted on at least two occasions to the Council of Eighteen as to whether it represents the official attitude and position of the GARBC; in each instance, it was the emphatic and unanimous opinion of the Council that it did so. If a man and church are right on the issue of separation—and their feet are pointed in the direction of separation—there is no violation of GARBC principle in cooperation and fellowship with them. This is and has been the GARBC position from the day it was organized.

From the beginning we have held that clean-cut, total, and absolute separation from apostasy is the only logical and Biblical stand. We have always held out a brotherly hand and maintained a sympathetic and understanding heart toward those honestly seeking to implement that position. We have maintained that there could be no fellowship and cooperation with those content to stay in the camp of the apostates.

There may be some who have not understood our position. The Association has no intention of deserting its original position and conviction. It may be true that occasionally a pastor, in his own personal convictions, feels that he cannot even fellowship and cooperate with such a man as we have described, though his feet are pointed in the right direction. That such a brother has a right to his convictions cannot be denied. But it can be denied, and here is denied, that he represents the attitude of the whole Association.

On the other hand, an occasional pastor and church in our Fellowship may enter into cooperative effort with pastors and churches who have no intention of separating from the Conventions. That such a church and pastor have a right to their convictions cannot be denied; but again it can be denied, and here is denied, that they represent the attitude of the Association.

It is conceded that in a Fellowship such as the GARBC there may be those who go to the extreme right. There may be some who go to the extreme left, but neither represents the great, solid heart and core of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches.

On the question of such matters as membership in local ministerial associations and participation in union Thanksgiving services and evangelistic campaigns where modernists and Convention-minded fundamentalists are involved, the Association takes the position of separation. Certainly pastors and churches ought to exercise care not to embarrass the Fellowship by violating the principles of the Association in either direction.

This original and fundamental principle characterized the GARBC in its inception and makes it necessary for it to stop and consider how far it can officially cooperate with religious leaders who endorse the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and declare that they do not wish to be called fundamentalists but conservative liberals.

When the GARBC, through its official organ, *The Baptist Bulletin*, or any other medium of expression, declares that statements like these put a religious leader who makes them “out of bounds,” we are not setting some new trend or announcing new policy. We are sticking to convictions and policies announced fifty years ago.

In this connection, it is interesting and significant to cite conclusions that Dr. Richard Ellsworth Day ascribes to the great "Breakfast Table Autocrat," Mr. Henry Parsons Crowell, in his biography under the above title. Mr. Crowell, multimillionaire breakfast cereal king and a lifelong Presbyterian, withdrew from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. a few years before his death. Dr. Day says that Mr. Crowell feared the battle between modernism and fundamentalism was not being lost because of modernists but because of those who "were tolerant toward those who were tolerant toward unbelievers."

We conceive of no greater statement of our position than this one ascribed to Mr. Crowell. Left to themselves, the modernists would be a sorry lot. But men who are fundamental and conservative in their personal views and yet see no reason why they cannot retain their relationship to and cooperation with the apostates make up the very class referred to in Mr. Crowell's biography. According to Dr. Day, that which caused Mr. Crowell to doubt ultimate victory was not the *modernists nor the conservative who was tolerant of the modernists*; but the *conservative fundamentalist who was tolerant of those who were tolerant of modernists*.

Mr. Crowell feared that the battle would be lost unless what some people call secondary separation also be made a working principle. It may be true that an occasional pastor or church in our Fellowship honestly feels that such cooperation is "within bounds." The Association has no ecclesiastical power to forbid a pastor and church to exercise their own conscience before God; but on the other hand, the Association must not be expected to remain silent as to its overall conviction that cooperation with men who have no intention of separating from the apostasy is out of bounds. There is no justification for stating that there is a "trend" away from our original position when we remind ourselves of the great principle of separation from apostasy unto Christ, the principle that gave us birth.

Perhaps we could do no better in clarifying this matter than to quote the official statement of the GARBC in 1936, republished in 1943. The statement was headed "The Attitude of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches."

In all the constant and current battle betwixt the hosts of the Lord and the hosts of darkness, both as it affects the church in her mission to a lost and dying world, and the presence of apostate ministers in her pulpits, the General Association believes that the clearest and most essential convictions may still be held by all in its Fellowship, and at the same time we may exercise consideration of and gracious regard for brethren in Christ who, truly loving the Lord and preaching His Word, are unable to see eye to eye with the separatist policy and program of the Association.

Let no pastor of a Convention church or any of his people consider that the General Association has an attitude of caustic criticism, bitter antagonism, or of egotistical superiority in pious pride. We are glad where men may lead souls to Christ; we rejoice wherever men may build up the body of Christ in the nature of the Lord; we rejoice whenever a true missionary who holds to the gospel of unadulterated grace is sent by any board, Baptist or otherwise, to

the field to aid in completing the task of world evangelism and hastening unto the day of the appearing of Christ.

Frankly, however, we deplore the fact that souls saved under such ministry are led to give to missions and support a general program which in such large portion is unorthodox, un-Biblical and un-Baptistic.

We believe the cause of Christ in all its purity would be greatly profited if all the pastors and churches who in themselves believe and teach the old historic faith would also insist that every dollar of their money and every effort of their cooperative service should be spent to propagate the same gospel abroad which they believe and cherish at home.

In spite of those who differ with us, we desire to be constantly patient and courteous, and while unswerving in our loyalty to our convictions, nevertheless heedful of the divine injunction to “be kindly affectioned one to another.”

* See also 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2; Matthew 7:15–20; Acts 20:28–31; and 3 John 6:11.