

On Union.

[The following correspondence appeared in the St. Thomas Journal. Some comments thereon will be found on the editorial page.—EDITOR EVANGELIST.]

AN OPEN LETTER

TO DISCIPLES, FREE WILL AND CALVINISTIC BAPTISTS THROUGHOUT ONTARIO.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN: The union of the various sections of Methodists in the Dominion has been fraught with considerable good, as every other denomination freely admits. And as there is a need, and I believe a desire, on the part of the various Baptist bodies to get closer together in their fellowship and work, I take the liberty of addressing a few lines to you on this subject.

The fundamental principles of the New Testament held by the different sections of Baptists, both in doctrine and church polity, are very similar. The differences lie rather in a few minor points, and mostly in phraseology or method. The beliefs common to us all are those truths which show our lost condition and the way of escape, the reform only through the meritorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. The necessity of the operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification of life, the obligation of all who believe in Christ to obey all His commands and confess their faith after the pattern of the Apostles and early Christians, as described in the New Testament; the responsibility of all the saved to assist in the proclamation of the Gospel to every creature; the support of those who need assistance, and the practicing of consistency in life and work; the independency of the churches; the ordination of elders, deacons, and all other officers warranted by Scripture. On the question of baptism (i.e., immersion) being obligatory upon all who have faith in Christ, we are one. The precise phraseology in expressing that, and a few other points, vary somewhat; but if we come down to a quiet examination of what is meant by each and all, it will generally be found we mean very much the same thing.

The Baptists of Canada should be one. They are not very numerous, possibly about 40,000 in actual members, and ten times that number of adherents. There is neither room nor population for the labors and expense incurred in the support of churches so similar to each other, and I earnestly appeal to the ministers, leading members, and those who have influence among the churches, to look into this matter and see if there is not a way by which we might all become united. And in saying this, I know I am expressing the sentiments of many members of the various Baptist bodies. It is a shame and disgrace to us, my Christian brethren, if we cannot come together into one common brotherhood for the furtherance of the Gospel among those who are ever ready to advise us to save ourselves from division, and sometimes opposition, before we seek the salvation of those without.

It may be said that those often called "Disciples" make a little more of baptism than some others; that those called "Free-Will Baptists" are somewhat Arminian and free communion; that the "Calvinistic Baptists" are strong on election, and that the "Regular Baptists" insist on a profession of faith by baptism, as a pre-requisite to communion. Are these points sufficient, my brethren, to keep the four bodies named apart? Can we not follow the example of some churches in the States and get together to see how near we really are to each other? To show the sincerity of my suggestions, I offer the use of my church in St. Thomas for a friendly and mutual conference respecting union. The Pedo-Baptist bodies have not yet seen their way to union, but that is no reason why the four sections of Baptists could not.

I appeal to you, therefore, to give this subject your most earnest and prayerful consideration. It may have to come by individual churches in various localities uniting, and, if so, why should not Elgin take the lead? For the honor of our Lord and Master, for the good of His cause on earth, for the dignifying of Christian character and the manifestation of a truer and nobler

form of Christian living, I ask your thoughtful attention to the subject of my letter.

"The end of all things is at hand," said the apostle, and I am sure you will agree with me that the will of the Lord is that His people should be one. For this purpose I invite your consideration of the matter of union, that the world, even by that, may in some measure see that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

D. SPENCER, Regular Baptist Minister. St. Thomas, Jan. 15, 1894.

THE AYLMER BAPTISTS TAKE STRONG GROUNDS AGAINST THE PROPOSED UNION.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE REV. D. SPENCER.

DEAR BROTHER: We, the pastor and deacons of the Aylmer Baptist church, with much surprise have read your letter in *The Journal* of the 15th inst., re the union of certain religious bodies. We are not so much surprised at your desire for union (better unity), but at some statements contained therein, which in substance meant that the differences existing between the various bodies addressed by you in said letter, were practically unreal, at least consisting "mostly in phraseology," i. e., in mere words, and that, therefore, there was no reason existing why they should not unite.

Now sir, kindly allow us to say, in the first place, that we positively will not enter into any newspaper war over this question, and that our sole desire is to place ourselves on record before all who are interested in this question, and those who do not thoroughly understand the position of the Regular Baptists.

We do not agree with you in regard to said statements, and occupy the same position as that held by the Baptist convention (not "association") when it met in Ottawa, where this same subject was introduced and discussed. It was there unceremoniously thrown out, and for the same reasons which we today hold, viz:

1. We, as Baptists, hold no principles with which we can or will dispense. We make no compromise.

2. We do see immense and all-important differences in the case mentioned by you.

3. The Regular Baptist denomination, as such, cannot act in this matter, and no more can any Baptist Association. If you persevere in this undertaking it will cause a sad and serious rupture among the Baptists of Elgin county.

Let us remind you that each Regular Baptist church is absolutely independent, and that, therefore, if any religious body wishes to confer in regard to this matter, it can be done only by consulting each Baptist church in each locality; e. g., if the Disciples of St. Thomas wish to unite with the Regular Baptists, they must consult the Centre Street Baptist church. That is a matter which concerns themselves alone, and not the whole Baptist body, nor even the Elgin Association.

Let us say, moreover, that merely nominal union is not union at all. Indeed it is worse than separation. This being the case, which church is ready to sacrifice her principles? The one which so does forfeits her place in the Regular Baptist denomination.

With us in Ontario this is an old and threadbare question. We are Baptists, not because of the name, but because we believe that we hold and preach the whole truth. Therefore we resolutely take our stand in opposition to your attitude and suggestions.

A. T. SOWERBY, pastor. GEO. NORTHRUP, WM. DARLING, E. L. CHUTE, JOHN GOSTICK, MARTIN HARRIS } Deacons. Aylmer, Jan. 23, 1894.

CHURCH UNION.

TO THE PASTOR AND DEACONS OF AYLMER BAPTIST CHURCH.

DEAR BRETHREN:—I have read your letter in *The Journal* of the 25th inst. with considerable surprise: (1) Because of the assumptions you make, and (2) because you answer a letter which was not addressed to you, nor written on behalf of the Aylmer Baptist church, nor the Elgin Association, nor

the Baptist convention. My letter was a personal one, and addressed "To Disciples, Free Will and Calvinistic Baptists," pointing out three things: (1) That divisions among Baptists, holding many truths in common, are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ; (2) that in the opinion of many, Baptist bodies were now much nearer together than is imagined, and (3) I suggested that those who felt a desire for closer union might meet in friendly counsel and see how near they were to each other. With the consent of my deacons my church is open for such a meeting. If nothing more is accomplished than to kneel together before our Father's Throne and pray for light, some good will result. I do not commit myself, or anyone else, to anything beyond that, nor did I think it gentlemanly, graceful or Christ-like to magnify the difficulties and differences, or minimize the advantages of union. It seemed to me to be a personal duty, as a minister of Jesus Christ, to hold out the olive branch of Christian courtesy to those desirous of seeing how far the Saviour's prayer for oneness could be fulfilled. I am, happily, well acquainted with the history, doctrines and polity of the various Baptist bodies throughout the world, and believe I am loyal from conviction, and not from birth or circumstances, to the great principles and polity of the Regular Baptist Denomination of Canada. I desire to teach and live those truths; and, on the question of union, follow in the lead of such men as Revs. Dr. Gordon, of Boston, Dr. Tupper, of Denver, Dr. McArthur, of New York, and the more prominent ministers of our own body in Canada. I make no claim for myself, nor admit of any for others, ministers or churches, to speak for the denomination. "Compromise" and dispensing with "principles" were not even hinted at in my letter. The question of union for some time to come is doubtless something for each individual and church to decide for themselves. I am willing to render any service I can in that direction and adhere to every word of my open letter, believing that the man who tries to promote unity among the Lord's people without sacrificing the principles of truth will serve his day and generation best, as well as his denomination, and be pleasing also to God.

With sincere esteem, fraternally yours,

D. SPENCER. St. Thomas, Jan. 26, 1894.

THE QUESTION OF UNION.

ANOTHER OPEN LETTER TO REV. D. SPENCER FROM THE OFFICERS OF THE AYLMER BAPTIST CHURCH.

DEAR BROTHER:—With much surprise we read your letter of the 27th, because it convinced us, beyond a doubt, that you are not conversant with the contents of your own first epistle, nor have you carefully perused ours. It is true that your letter was addressed to "Disciples, Free Will and Calvinistic Baptists throughout Ontario"; but you yourself forgot this before you finished writing it, as therein you earnestly appeal to the ministers, leading members, and all those who have influence among the churches, to look into this matter, and see if there is not a way by which we may become united. Please note the fact also that you sign yourself, "Regular Baptist minister." Now with this signature before your eyes, kindly tell us who the "we" are, and who are to be "united." Permit us to state that even a child can easily see that the Regular Baptists are involved.

You say that we replied to a letter which was not addressed to us. Allow us to contradict this by the following quotation from our own letter: "Our sole desire is to place ourselves on record before all who are interested in this question, and those who do not thoroughly understand the position of the Regular Baptists." However, we are pleased to note from your second letter that as the "Disciples, Free Will and Calvinistic Baptists" are the only ones addressed by you, therefore the Regular Baptists are not in it. It is only Mr. Spencer, the "Disciples, Free Will and Calvinistic Baptists." Your charge that we are "ungentlemanly," etc., we treat with quiet indifference. "Judge not that ye be not judged."

You assert that we "magnify the difficulties and differences" and "minimize the advantages of union." We

flatly deny this, and say that your inability to see these differences does not prove their non-existence.

You say that you did not "commit" yourself, but your first letter stands in print, and contains the following: "The differences lie rather in a few minor points, and mostly in phraseology or method." Again: "But if we come down to a quiet examination of what is meant by each and all, it will generally be found we mean very much the same thing." This language means that Mr. Spencer is nearly as much a Disciple as a Regular Baptist, and as to "compromise" and "dispensing with principles," it is not necessary to be "hunted at" by you, as we consider that you are fully "committed."

You try to put a slight upon our judgment by stating that you follow in the lead "of the more prominent ministers of our own body in Canada." Must we again remind you that the Baptist convention threw out this question at Ottawa? Therefore we demand that you produce the names in the *Journal*, as we do not choose to accept bare assertions. Of course you must be aware that the "leading ministers of our own denomination" were assembled at that convention.

We once more assure the readers of this letter that we, too, are "loyal from conviction, and not from birth or circumstances, to the great principles and polity of the regular Baptist Denomination of Canada." We now have served our purpose and will write no more.

Yours, for the defence of the gospel, A. T. SOWERBY, Pastor.

GEO. NORTHRUP, WM. DARLING, E. L. CHUTE, GEO. LEMON, JOHN GOSTICK, MARTIN HARRIS } Deacons.

P. S.—We recommend you to read the *North-West Baptist* of the last six months and thus see if there are no differences.

BAPTIST UNION.

OPEN LETTER TO THE OFFICERS OF THE AYLMER BAPTIST CHURCH.

DEAR BRETHREN: In reply to your letter in the *Journal* of yesterday's date I am quite content to leave your correspondence and mine, on the question of Baptist union, to the judgment of the denomination and the Christian public generally. They will judge rightly, both of its spirit and purpose. Let us pray as Jesus Christ prayed: "That they all may be one, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me," and then work for it. You have doubtless come to a very wise decision to "write no more."

Yours very sincerely, D. SPENCER. St. Thomas, Feb. 1, 1894.

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