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Shall it be the Baptist Church or the Baptist Sect?

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CHURCH or sect? There is no supreme question before the people of the Baptist churches. We do not mean a church in the sense of a form of church policy. We could still say that we are the Baptist churches and not the Baptist church. There is, however, a sense in which this great body of believers is a church, a spiritual sense, as including all those who have had a common experience with God through Jesus Christ, as a Saviour.

A church is greater than a sect. A church includes many souls united by one spirit, growing out of faith in some one great fact and idea. Its members are bound together by a common life, a common love for Christ, and a common faith as to the essential truth in the relation of men to God, through Jesus Christ. They are one spiritual body, pervaded by the spirit of Christ, and have become one body, because of a common experience of salvation, by Jesus Christ.

A sect is a body of people to whom has come a distorted view of the importance of some religious service, or some secondary truth, which is magnified out of all place and proportion. The service and the truth may be important and vital enough, when in their order and place; but they are secondary, perhaps the corollary of some primary fact. These are thrust into the fore as the test of fellowship and as the fundamental things. The sect may have possession of a truth, great enough to make it a church, or even the church of the future; but its vision of the relative importance of the primary truth is clouded with the magnified corollary, and the effort to realize the fundamental fact is weakened by the stress laid upon the observance of what is secondary. The sect may have as many members as the church; but it is not a question of highness, or of numerical strength. It is a matter of spirit and disposition.

No body of Christians exists which has so fundamental, so broad and so vital a thesis for the existence of a church, as the Baptists. Historically they have stood for spiritual religion, in extreme opposition to the churchly or sacramental idea of religion, and equally removed from the credal idea of the Christianity. Ever they have, though not always seeing the significance of it, contended for the spiritual constitution of the church; for its spiritual guidance and government; for the same guidance and government of the soul, which gives it liberty, and for the spiritual contact of the soul with God in immediate experience. Its ordinances were: always symbols of its faith and life; and the record of the lives, inspired by the Spirit of God in like experiences, the Bible, has been the only critique of the spiritual guidance of the member and the church.

This is the widest, freest, noblest conception of them all; the clearest idea to reason and morals for the constitution of a church. It is ours though we have been frightfully Presbyterianized in some periods, and have been tempted to make our reason for existence a common belief instead of a common life in Christ; and are ever in peril of losing the idea in the emphasis upon the ordinances.

Those whom we claim as our spiritual ancestry, our unvaried practice of receiving members on the basis of their experience in salvation, the history of our contention for the spiritual conception of Christianity and the church, all reveal the greatness of our thesis for the constitution of the church. Religion is the life of God in the soul. Christianity is the life of God in the soul through an immediate personal experience with Jesus Christ. If that is true, then the church should be constituted of those who have that life of God in them. This is the doctrine popularly called the doctrine of regenerate church membership.

In the same conception of what Christianity is, we see that the church should be governed and guided in the continuing activity of that life of God in the souls of its members. And here we have the doctrine of congregational church government. Confidence in the reality of that life of God in the soul leads the church to trust the government and guidance of the individual soul, to the same spiritual experience with God, through Jesus Christ. The same faith requires that the record of the lives especially inspired, and chosen of God, should be the test and measure of the guidance the soul believes himself to have had from God. Thus we derive our doctrine of soul liberty, and the faith that the Bible is the sufficient rule for faith and practice. So also the only symbols for the use of the church should be those which are the symbols of this experience; its beginning, by the symbol of baptism; and its continuance, by the symbol of a Lord's Supper.

Now the question is whether we shall be willing to conceive ourselves from the point of view of the fundamental fact or will insist on conceiving ourselves from the point of view of a secondary fact, or even from the position of the observance of an ordinance. Shall we be broad enough to receive all who accept the profound principle and live it, giving, in fact as well as name, liberty to vary in the secondary matters; or shall we insist that fidelity to the symbols of the experience and faith requires us to emphasize and exact, from all whom we receive, the form of the symbols which we believe, for the most part, was the intention of the original observance?

That's a serious question; but the answer will determine whether we shall be a church or a sect. Rightly conceiving ourselves we would see that the fundamental fact and truth are too important to be clogged and obscured with what we call the logical conclusions.

That the fact that Christianity is a life of God in the soul, through faith in Jesus Christ, without the mediation of church, priest, or creed of church, is too significant a contention to bind up irrevocably with a form or ordinance, or a limit of fellowship in a Lord's Supper. Nothing is so little of what we call logical, as life. Life is biological; it carries its own law within itself.

Whether we can, as a body of churches, conceive ourselves broadly enough to rise into the character and dignity of a church, or will continue to permit such tithing of the mint and cummin of symbol and ordinance, as makes us sectarian in spirit, time alone will tell. There are many, however, whose soul's consent to our fundamental truth is absolute; and who long for the time when the Baptist churches shall become a Baptist church, not necessarily in the ecclesiastical sense, but in spiritual comprehension and power. And there await us thousands of the most intelligent and noble souls, ready to go with us on this broad conception of our denomination, which is now so often in peril of obscuration by virtue of the narrower ideal, which begets the sectarian spirit.

The Value of a Denominational Paper.

W. W. BARKER.

WHAT is a Baptist denominational paper? A paper that suits the majority of the people of our denomination; those of Bushtown church as well as those of Grand Avenue Church, Philadelphia. It is not the paper of a few pastors or theological professors, but one in which all may find something for soul and mind, one wherein people may express themselves, though they may widely differ. It is a Baptist association (on paper), weekly, the editor being moderate.

The editor having a big heart, a hand to grip a pen of iron, a brain large enough to see as many phases of truth as an Indian sees of the moon, and eyes that peer into hearts, homes,

missions, slums and churches, should know his family of readers as a mother does her children.

A subscriber should be a person that will take the paper for principle's sake and not give it up if the editor does not agree with him in all matters, or if an article he sends is not inserted. He should pay for his paper. He should have in mind Psalm cxix: 165.

The necessity of a denominational paper proves its value. If papers are necessary for the consideration of the affairs of this world, surely the affairs of God's kingdom should be known by its sons. If saloon-keepers, prize-fighters and other emissaries of the devil have their papers, surely Christians need theirs. A denominational paper is next to a man's Bible. As a Christian he is interested in the progress of truth and looks beyond his own church. He thanks God he has brethren in the faith and desires to know more about them and how he may work with them for the common cause.

A denominational paper is valuable because it edifies. We can learn more from each other. A paper like this is a common forum. People see the truth as it is appreciated by others. Truth is not only local. The strength of a denomination is in its people's intelligence of its faith.

A denominational paper clarifies. A poor religion cannot stand the light of day. Truth can show herself in a true denominational paper. If any brethren are wrong, those that love them may correct them. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

A denominational paper verifies. The voice of people that dare look each text of the Bible in the face will by the aid of the Holy Spirit give truth its place. And at times when a special doctrine needs emphasizing, the value of a denominational paper is evident.

A denominational paper diversifies. The many writers for a denominational paper bring such varied and diverse articles before the people that old doctrines have a new application, and present-day matters receive the attention they deserve.

A denominational paper fortifies. With each man a jealous sentinel on the ramparts of the fortress of truth, the enemy is immediately seen and the soldiers are around to do battle. In what better way can we be informed of the doings of the enemies of liberty, of the public schools, of Christ's cause, than by the denominational paper? "Forewarned is forearmed."

A denominational paper vivifies. It stirs up the fires. It encourages pastors and people. It prepares the young men and women of our churches for the positions of trust that will fall to them some day. We pastors know that the wide-awake people of our churches are those that take a denominational paper; they become acquainted with Baptist usage—a thing not so well understood as it might be.

A denominational paper glorifies God, and this is its reason for its existence. In making people and churches better and more intelligent in their work for God it establishes the fact of its priceless value.

I cannot value a Baptist. Who knows what he is to do for the world? Can you tell me the worth of William Carey? Then I cannot estimate the value of a Baptist paper, because it is a maker and strengthener of Baptists whom I consider people that love and stand by the Bible in its whole teaching.

The Value of Appearances.

The man who lives beyond his means to keep up appearances, or who professes to be able to do what he cannot do, or who pretends to know what he does not know, or who apes a virtue which he possesses not, works very hard for very poor returns. He simply has the satisfaction of having deceived a few superficial people for a longer or shorter time, and having obtained from them certain considerations that they would never have bestowed with open eyes. Perhaps