

Union Meetings.

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What my duty or privilege is in regard to what are called "union meetings" is a question. Whether I should participate in one or not, it seems to me, would depend upon what the object of the meeting might be, and the manner of conducting it. Suppose it is for the specific purpose of converting sinners. This is right, and it is my duty to engage in this work when and where I can. If it would be for the furtherance of this object to join with others, then it would be my duty to do so.

1. But in going into such a meeting, may I withhold or compromise any truth? Of course not. Such an act is a step into or towards apostasy from God.

But suppose the party with whom it is proposed I should unite, teaches much truth but some error in the matter of enlightening and leading the sinner to salvation, may I not work in the meeting as far as truth will permit, and then—! Then what? Well, then be mum? That is, may I help and hurry forward every one that I can as far as truth permits, knowing that they or most of them will go wrong from the point where I leave them, and that they will be devoted to error largely on account of my lack of fidelity to the end?

2. But am I permitted to, in the meeting, counsel, exhort and guide all sinners into all that is true as far as I can, and to warn, exhort and lead all the sinners that I can away from all errors into which I suppose they are liable to fall or go?

If yes be the answer to both of the questions, then I see no reason why I may not take part in said meeting. If no be the answer to either of the above questions, I, of course, can have nothing to do in or with said meeting.

3. Before going into a union meeting, is there an obligation taken, or is it generally understood to have been taken, either in express words or by implication, that I would not or should not preach or teach anything that a sinner was taught to believe or do in order to be saved under the teachings of Jesus and the apostles? Then I can not, of course, take part in such a meeting. In so saying, I am assuming that the New Testament furnishes us the exact plan of the sinner's salvation,

and that it was intended to be our guide in doing our part of said work, and that any departure therefrom, at least any known departure, is sin.

4. If I were requested to take part in such a so-called union meeting as we are considering, I would raise the question: Would the apostles, if they were here, take part in it? Would they participate in a meeting where sinners are called upon to "stand up," or to "kneel for prayer," where the prayers are for the Holy Spirit to "Come down and convert these anxious ones just now"? I have no thought that these inspired men would look with favor upon such a proceeding for a moment. Jesus nor the apostles ever did so in any meeting. The Divine pattern has no suggestion of such a thing.

5. Would the apostles approve or permit in a meeting in which they could reasonably be regarded as willing workers that sinners should give as proof of their conversion, that they had "got a hope," or had "felt that they were converted," or that they were through, or that they had come to believe? I suppose not.

6. Would the apostles take part in a meeting where they would not be permitted to say to sinners in a loud voice that if they would be saved, they should each one "Repent and be baptized on the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins?" Or, "Arise and be baptized and have thy sins washed away"?

Mr. Moody said in substance that if one mentions baptism in one of his union meetings it would break up the meeting. It was not permitted in the Mills meeting at Nashville, Tenn., that a few selections of Scriptures, bearing directly on the conversion of sinners, should be printed and circulated among the enquirers. It would, of course, break up the meeting. Howbeit, brethren, is that fact not proof satisfactory that the meeting ought to have been broken up? To me it is.

At Hammond's meeting in St. Louis, Mo., some years ago the brethren attempted to distribute some cards with three or four verses of Scripture on each, and they were publicly rebuked for it. Mr. Hammond hoped the attempt would never be made again. I myself heard him say so.

But says one, "It is not necessary to be always preaching on baptism, is it?" Such is the language of one who is growing tired of apostolic restraints and guidance. No, it is not necessary to be always preaching on baptism, that is; to preach nothing else. No one ever did so. But it is a fact that we should preach baptism just as the apostles did, and it is a fact that in

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every meeting for the conversion of sinners and in every case of the conversion of a sinner, baptism was preached. No conversion took place without it. Nor did the apostles ever explicitly or implicitly pledge themselves not to disturb the meeting by insisting on baptism or any other provision made by Jesus for the salvation of men. Their idea was: It is better to obey God rather than men. Am I, then, opposed to so-called union meetings? Not at all. If one should be proposed, in which I should be permitted to preach and teach as the apostles did, and it should be stipulated that the truth as I see it may have an even chance with error, I would participate. That is, I would, unless I thought harm and not good would come of it. In this latter case I should decline on that ground plainly avowed.

By the way, are the meetings such as are now commonly called union meetings really union meetings? Is the word union ever employed in the Scriptures in the sense in which it is used in our talks now concerning union meetings? Not at all. The New Testament is a stranger to the expression, union meeting. The union which is of the Bible, speaketh on this wise: "Speak the same thing;" "that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment," 1 Cor. i. 10. Again, Eph. iv. 1-6. Here again the union mentioned is a unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This "unity of Spirit" or this being "of one mind and one judgment," is logically followed by "one body," "one spirit" (Holy Spirit), "one Lord," "one faith" (which is the Faith), "one baptism," "one God," etc. This unity of Spirit, of the Faith, of mind, of judgment, etc., antecedes all outward formal co-operative union. Until this unity of the Spirit is substantially reached there is no union that is not as "rotten as Denmark." Until the unity of the Faith is had the more division the better. No one should try to have it appear that any two or any ten thousand persons are in union such as God would sanction who are not in the unity of "the Faith" of the Son of God.

I once engaged in a so-called union meeting. A distinguished Methodist preacher invited me to join him in one, and I did so. But it was distinctly stated and stipulated that (1) I should preach one-half of the time, and (2) I should preach all truth as far as I could, as I understood it, and (3) there should be no mourning bench foolishness, infant baptism or sprinkling for baptism in our meeting, and (4) we should take the confessions of all who should be ready for it in the true apostolic fashion, and then at once baptize them. This program was carried out to the letter. There were a dozen or more additions.

I have several times since been invited to go into meetings called union. In every such case I proposed to do my whole duty to declare the whole will of God for the salvation of sinners, and this always broke up the meeting.

Says one: "You united with one man with whom you were not in agreement as to Divine unities; why not with others?" I did not unite with him any more than I did with Dr. Ditzler in Louisville, in 1870. The fact that we stood up and spoke our sentiments fully in a friendly way to the same audience on the same days is not proof that we were united in a Scriptural manner, or in a Bible sense. There is no Christian union where the parties are not first of one mind and judgment as it respects "The Faith." These may and ought to co-operate rejoicingly in the great work of salvation from sin and death.—*The Christian Guide*.

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