



“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,”

II Corinthians 9:6.

Church Cooperation

Lesson Aim: The study of Articles 18, 19, 20. 18. That all scriptural churches should ever be held as equal units as to their rights and privileges in their associated capacity. 19. That all scriptural associated assemblies and their committees are servants of the churches. 20. That we brand as unscriptural open communion, alien baptism, pulpit affiliation with heretical ministers, unionism, modernism, modern conventionism, one-church dictatorship, and all kindred evils arising from these practices.

L335. Date: November 1964. **Text:** II Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-19.

Topic: Church: Work of.

INTRODUCTION — There is strength in unity. There is strength in numbers when all concerned work toward the same goal. Therefore a group of churches can accomplish more in missions, education, benevolence, publications, and other fields of endeavor, than would be possible if each church worked alone. For this reason, local churches have voluntarily joined in cooperative efforts with sister churches to pool their resources and extend their outreach. Such an organization of churches is the North American Baptist Association [hereafter referred to as Baptist Missionary Association of America], organized in 1950, which is composed of conservative missionary Baptist churches.

Agreement is the basis for such association. In church relationships, there must be agreement concerning doctrines and methods. **“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”** Amos 3:3. Understanding this truth, representatives of churches composing the Baptist Missionary Association of America drew up a “Doctrinal Statement” expressing our convictions. For a church to become a member of this Association, she must express her

agreement with these doctrines. No church has the right to join in association with groups who hold heretical doctrines or erroneous practices.

The term “cooperation” suggests “joint effort.” Church cooperation suggests several local congregations joining efforts, with each one doing his share, to reach a desired goal. To cooperate in an Association means more than merely belonging. It means to actually contribute to the realization of the objectives of the Association. A cooperating church is a church which contributes money, prayer, counsel, personnel, and other things needed to promote the work. This lesson on “Church Cooperation” is presented with the desire that it may enlist greater aid of the churches in our Associational ministry at home and in foreign fields.

EXPOSITION

I. BLESSINGS IN COOPERATION, II Corinthians 8:1-4.

1. Faithful cooperation among churches brings new expressions of the grace of God, verse 1. Today's lesson text refers to a cooperation of early churches in a benevolent enterprise. Drought and famine had struck Palestine. Word came to the churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Under Paul's leadership, they resolved to make up an offering and send it to Jerusalem to relieve the distress of the saints.

The churches of Macedonia responded in such a way to this appeal that Paul called attention to the grace of God manifested toward them. Through their deep poverty and in the midst of a great trial of affliction, they gave a most liberal offering. So liberal had been their offering that Paul was hesitant to receive it all, verses 3-4. Their efforts and sacrificial giving were the opportunity for God to express His grace (unmerited favor) toward them by special blessings. God's “grace” toward them was (1) a willingness to give sacrificially, (2) a willingness to help others in spite of their own distress, (3) a deep joy in the Spirit, (4) and commendation from heaven and among men for their manifest Christian spirit.

2. Faithful cooperation among churches brings increasing joy in Christ, verse 2. The brethren in Macedonia experienced “abundance of joy” as they cooperated with their sister churches in this benevolent ministry. Even under adverse outward conditions, the Christian brethren rejoiced in the Lord.

This joy is still experienced. Have you attended an Associational meeting, or read one of the denominational papers, and found your heart rejoicing because of the great work done by cooperation of churches? Have

you rejoiced as mission offerings reach new heights, or as publication ministries are expanded, or as new schools are organized and older schools strengthened? This is something of the joy the Macedonian brethren because of their cooperation with sister churches.

Every church can cooperate in these ministries. Whether the financial strength of a local congregation is large or small, she can give proportionately and feel assured that she is bearing her part of the cooperative project. So a church which would never send a missionary to foreign fields, nor print a Sunday school quarterly, nor organize and support a college, nor support an orphan's home, can do all these things in cooperation with sister churches. And she will rejoice in the work that is done!

3. Faithful cooperation among churches often calls forth more sacrificial service than would otherwise be given, verses 3-4. There is a blessing in sacrificial service, though most Christians usually sacrifice little for Jesus. When one has given his last dollar to the Kingdom and has seen the Lord come to his rescue, when he has reached the end of his ability and discovered the resources God makes available, then he knows the benefit in sacrificial service. We would trust Jesus much more and love Him much more if we served Him more sacrificially. Some people feel that if they drive to church in the rain or cold, they have made a sacrifice for the Lord! Such shallow thinking is a shame to one who calls himself by the name of Christ. Only when service for the Lord has cut deep and cost you something very dear, then and only then, can you say a sacrificial service has been rendered.

Cooperative projects challenge churches to sacrificial service. Without a cooperative program, many churches spend all their money at home. They become centered in the local area, forgetting the worldwide commission of the Lord. Cooperation with sister churches lifts the vision to fields beyond. It makes us want to invest something in the Kingdom work outside our own immediate interests. It calls to sacrifice.

4. Faithful cooperation among churches enlarges opportunity for each local congregation. Cooperation means more than having one's name on the roll. Cooperation does not mean my church takes advantage of literature paid for by someone else, of schools supported by someone else, of sharing the glory or a missions program financed by someone else, of sending needy children to an orphan's home provided by someone else. A church is not a cooperating member of an association unless she supports the program of that association of churches. Supporting the program means more than an occasional offering to one phase of the work. Most people have one phase of work which is of greater interest. However, the total program involves

missions, benevolence, publications, education, etc. To support one and neglect the other would be like a parent feeding one child while requiring the others to starve. Loyal cooperation affords the opportunity to support the total program.

II. EQUALITY OF COOPERATING CHURCHES, II Corinthians 8:13-19, 23-24.

1. Each church is equal in responsibility to carry her part of the load, verses 13:15. Isn't it strange how the tendency persists to pass the burden on to others! A poorer church member may say, "Let the wealthy member pay the expenses. A smaller church may say, "Let the big churches pay the costs." Paul is careful to point out that the burden is not to be borne by a few. There is to be equality among all who cooperate. Each one is to do his part according to his ability.

It is wrong for a church to enjoy the benefits of an associational organization without having a part in bearing the responsibilities of the work. In our Association, there is no executive authority to require a church to support the programs. There should be none for each church is "independent and equal." Yet, it seems only the ingrate would be willing to receive continually without contributing anything. When a new member unites with a local church, he pledges himself to loyal cooperation and support. If he fails to perform this obligation, he has deceived the church. The same is true of the church which fails to stand by her sister churches in denominational affiliation. To join and not support is to deceive.

2. Each church is equal in authority in the administration of the work, verses 16-19. The funds being contributed for the poor saints in Jerusalem must have someone designated to receive and disburse them. So a "brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches" was "chosen of the churches" to travel with Paul and his company for the purpose of administering the funds contributed. This is not called an "association" in II Corinthians 8:16-19, but that is what it was. This is the way an association of our churches operates today.

Each church, regardless of size or amount of offerings, elects from her membership a set number of messengers to represent her in the Associational meeting. Each church has the same number of messengers to express her opinion by voice and vote. These messengers, in turn, elect a "brother whose praise is in the gospel" (that is, who is known for his piety and ability) to direct the different phases of the work: missions, education, publications, etc. Upon returning home, the messengers report to their local

congregation what was done. The local church should then support the program set out by the messengers of the churches unless she feels it is directly opposed to the will of God.

This is church equality of the highest order. Independent and sovereign churches submit themselves to one another in brotherly love and confidence. Each church is free from denominational control with the right to withdraw from cooperation when she chooses. In like manner, she is also free to submit herself to the program of the association for the advancement of the purposes and work of the Kingdom of God.

3. Each church is equal in representation in all meetings, verses 23-24. Those sent on missions approved by the messengers of the churches are no more the representatives of one church than of another. They equally represent all the churches that had a part in selecting and sending them. The choice was not left to a few large churches with many messengers and forced upon the smaller churches with few messengers. Neither do the large churches have any extra authority over the small congregations. Each congregation, regardless of numerical size, has equal representation. There can be no big "I" and little "you" in such a system of representation. Looking to the Lord Jesus alone as master, all churches look upon one another as equals and all messengers of the churches are equal brethren.

4. Each church is equal in her independence. Occasionally a Baptist congregation will refuse to join in associations with other churches because they want to remain "independent." Does a church lose her independency when she affiliates with a group of sister churches? No, indeed! The church which voluntarily enters an association of churches is no less independent than when it refrained from entering. The Association simply affords a channel by which the work of the church is done outside its local community. The Bible allows no ruling committee, board, or other ecclesiastical organization, to have authority over one of the Lord's churches. Jesus alone is her head. Any who would seek control over the Lord's churches is usurping his place!

Those churches which cooperate with the Baptist Missionary Association of America [BMAA] are fully independent and sovereign, though in full cooperation with sister churches in an associational fellowship and program. Most churches who use this Sunday school quarterly are cooperating members of this Association.

III. AREAS OF COOPERATION, Romans 16:17-18.

1. Churches may cooperate in the area of Christian benevolence. Those

offerings discussed in I Corinthians 16:1-4 and II Corinthians 8 and 9 were received for benevolent purposes. They were to be sent to Jerusalem for the aid of drought and famine stricken Christians. Many churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia cooperated in this offering. This is the Biblical example for benevolent work by our churches. The Apostle James has written, **“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world,”** James 1:27. In response to this challenge, our churches support a benevolent ministry to care for orphaned children and aged ministers. This we believe to be a part of the work of the Lord's churches. Each individual state has its own institutions and agencies to carry on this work.

2. Churches cooperate in the area of Christian education. The Great Commission of the Lord, recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, sets out a threefold obligation: (1) Go and teach so as to make disciples; (2) baptize the converts in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; (3) teach them to observe all things God has commanded. The ministry of Christian education seeks to fulfill the third part of this commission. Such effort takes a twofold approach.

First, churches cooperate in Christian education by the publication of Bible-centered literature. The BMAA publishes literature for use in Sunday school, Training Service [Christian Growth], Women's Missionary Auxiliary, Girl's Auxiliary, Galileans, Brotherhood, Youth Work, etc.

Second, churches cooperate in Christian education through the support of educational institutions. Several state associations have colleges they support through the denominational organization. The national association supports one theological seminary, BMAA Theological Seminary, located in Jacksonville, Texas.

The total educational program of our Association includes the efforts of many writers of literature, teachers in schools and churches, and many other helpers—along with the readers mentioned above. As your church supports the Association through her prayers and offerings, you have a part in this ministry.

3. Churches cooperate in the area of home and foreign missions. Paul says specifically that other churches paid his salary while he worked as a missionary in Corinth, II Corinthians 11:8. Following this example, churches composing the BMAA support a missions program in the United States and many foreign countries. Missionaries serve in the continental United States where the Baptist witness is unknown or is weak. These are called “interstate” missionaries because they work within our national boundaries.

Other missionaries work in foreign lands and are designated “foreign” missionaries. At present, the BMAA is supporting missionaries in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Brazil, Portugal, France, Cape Verde Islands, British West Indies, Formosa, and Japan. The quality of the men who are serving in these places and the urgent need for workers to represent Christ there, make it imperative that each church support this missions program. Each church should give regular monthly offerings to missions through the Association.

CONCLUSION—It is right and proper for churches to join in cooperative efforts to promote the Lord's cause. A church does not lose her sovereignty and independence by such cooperation. The New Testament sets out evidence that the early churches so cooperated. Those who join such an effort must be agreed in doctrines and practices—both being related to the Word of God which is the final authority, Galatians 1:6.9; Romans 16:17-18. Is your church actively supporting the Lord's work with her sister churches?

QUESTIONS

1. Why should churches cooperate in their work?
2. What does the term “association” mean?
3. Can a church join an Association of churches without losing her independency?
4. Why do we stress “equality of representation” in our Associations? What is it and how does it differ from some other Baptist groups?
5. How does cooperation provide enlarged outreach?
6. What benevolent work does your church support?
7. How is this quarterly a product of cooperation between churches?
8. What percentage of her income does your church give to missions?
9. Who are the leaders of our Associational publications, missions, and seminary ministry?
10. Why should all church cooperation be based on doctrinal agreement?