



“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 associational 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.

L505. Date: March 1960. **Text:** II Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-19, 23-24; Romans 16:17-18. **Topic:** Church: Cooperation of.

INTRODUCTION—A true New Testament church must be careful of its affiliations. A “church” is “an assembly of people called out from the world by the preaching of the gospel, accompanied by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and baptized in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, to a life of conformation to the will of God, and to execute the will and perpetuate the ordinances of Christ until He comes,” (Cobb's New Manual for Baptist Churches). Because it is a sacred institution and is devoted to the will of God, each church must be careful to keep free from alliances with those individuals or organizations who hold and promote error.

However, each church must cooperate with sister churches if her most effective work is done. In unity there is strength. A group of churches can accomplish a ministry in missions, education, benevolence, publications, etc., which would be impossible without such effort. This very quarterly which you are reading would never have been printed without the united publications ministry of the Baptist Missionary Association of America [formerly North American Baptist Association.] However, each church must

be careful as to its affiliation. Associations of churches may be formed only if these churches agree on doctrine and methods of doing the Lord's will. No church has the right to join in associations with groups of heretical doctrines or erroneous practices. Our own Baptist Missionary Association of America requires churches to subscribe to her doctrinal statement before being admitted to membership. Doctrinal truth must be the center of any religious union. Let us thank God that He has given us many sister churches with which we can cooperate in the promotion of His work.

EXPOSITION

1. The Blessings of Church Cooperation, II Corinthians 8:1-4.

1. It brings a new expression of the grace of God, verse 1. Paul points out how abundantly the grace of God had been manifested toward the churches of Macedonia. This grace (meaning, “unmerited favor”) came at an unexpected time and for an unexpected reason. It came during a time of deep poverty and in the midst of a great trial of affliction. It came as a result of the Corinthian church cooperating with other churches to relieve the necessity of destitute saints in Jerusalem. They had joined in the offering because of Christian love and a sincere concern for the welfare of their brethren. Their efforts, however, had given God an opportunity to express His grace toward them in special blessings. Thus is the work of God often seen most wonderfully through the cooperative venture of His churches. The united effort of church cooperation will bring increased blessings to the person who is sincerely working therein.

2. It increases Christian joy, verse 2. In spite of the great trial of affliction and deep poverty, the grace of God caused the Corinthian believers to rejoice. This reminds us again that Christian joy is not restricted to outward circumstances, but can be possessed even when all outward conditions are adverse. To receive the grace of God is to be made glad. There is no joy comparable to that which is received when the heart is right with God through Jesus Christ and the life is dedicated to His will. Have you ever attended an associational meeting, or read one of the denominational papers, and found your heart rejoicing because of the great work reported being done? Have you rejoiced as mission offerings reach new heights, or as publication enterprises are successful, or as new schools are organized for religious training? This is the joy that comes as a result of cooperation. Whether the financial strength of your church is great or small, when she

gives proportionately she can be glad that she has done her best in the united effort of the association of churches of which she is a part.

3. It brings the opportunity of rendering sacrificial service, verses 3-4. Paul pictures the church at Corinth as being willing to do all they could, and even wishing they could go further in rendering aid to their distressed brethren. Generally speaking, we make very little sacrifice for Jesus. Perhaps this is to our own disadvantage. There is a blessing in sacrificial service. When one has given his last dollar and has seen the Lord provide more, when one has reached the end of his ability and has seen the Lord come to his rescue, he has had a unique blessing of rendering sacrificial service. We would trust Him much more and love Him much more sincerely if we served Him more sacrificially. Our modern generation thinks that if you drive to church in the rain you have made a sacrifice! God have mercy on us if our concept of sacrificial service is so shallow. When you have served the Lord in such a way that it has cut deep and cost you something very dear, then and only then, can you say a sacrificial service has been rendered. However, the blessings of God outweigh any cost we may suffer in service.

The church which is not cooperating with sister churches in a united effort is missing a great opportunity. Cooperation means more than having the name on the roll. A church is not a cooperating member of an association unless she supports the program of that association. This also means more than an occasional offering to one phase of the work, but involves a consistent, regular and proportionate support of all its work. Is your church a “cooperating member” according to this definition?

II. The Equality in Church Cooperation, II Corinthians 8:13-19, 23.24.

1. Each church should bear her proportionate share of responsibility, verses 13-15. Paul is careful to point out that the burden is not to be borne by a few. There is to be equality among all the members. It is wrong for a church to share the benefits of the associational organization and work without having a part in helping carry its burdens. Our churches are truly “independent and equal” and should be so in support of the work. While the association does not, and indeed cannot, exercise authority to require support of the churches, it seems they would either support it or quit it. A member of the local church who does not support with his presence, prayers, and offerings is useless to the church. He contributes nothing to its work or to the glory of the Lord. The same is true of the church who fails to stand by her sister churches in denominational affiliation. To join and not support is

to deceive.

2. Each church should have equal authority, verses 16-19. These verses speak of the churches joining to select certain ones who were to be responsible for the receipt and disbursement of funds. This is not called an “association” in II Corinthians 8:16-19, but that is what it is. This is exactly what we do today. We ask each church to select messengers to represent her and express her voice. Each church selects the same number of messengers, regardless of size or amount of offering. This gives each church equal opportunity to express herself by voice and by vote. These messengers of the churches meet in “associational meetings” and transact business relating to the work of the denomination. They return home to report on what has been done. The local church should then feel an obligation to support the actions of the association unless she feels it is directly opposed to the will of God. This is church equality of the highest order. The independent and sovereign churches submit themselves to one another in brotherly love and confidence. Each church is free from associational control and has authority to withdraw when she chooses, but likewise submits herself to the program of the association for the advancement of its purposes and work.

3. Each church should be fully represented, verses 23-24. Those sent on the mission of the churches are no more the messengers of one church than of another. They equally represent all those churches who had a part in selecting and sending them. The choice was not left to a few large churches and enforced upon the small ones. Neither do the large churches have any extra authority over them. Upon this principle the sovereignty and equality of the churches are protected. There can be no big “I” in such a system. This remembers the words of Christ, *“For one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren,”* Matthew 23:8.

4. Each church is to be completely independent. Some Baptist churches refuse to join in associations with other churches because of an insistence that they are “independent.” The only thing they are independent of is the help of their sister churches. 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. While some denominations seek to control their churches, the Bible allows no ruling committee, board, or other organization such authority. Christ is the head of the church and only He has authority over her. Any who would seek to gain this control is usurping His place! The churches in cooperation with our Baptist Missionary Association of America are fully independent and sovereign, though in full cooperation with sister churches in an associational capacity.

Let us be thankful to God that we are a part of such a body.

III. The Areas of Church Cooperation, Romans 16:17-18.

1. The churches cooperate in the area of benevolence. The offerings mentioned in I Corinthians 16:1-4 and II Corinthians 8 and 9, were being received to send to the relief of poor saints in Jerusalem. This was cooperation in the area of benevolence. We remember the importance put upon this ministry by James, who writes: *"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. Through the state associations, our churches care for the orphans and give to the aid of aged ministers. An extremely valuable ministry is performed thereby and God is honored in it.

2. The churches cooperate in the area of Christian education. The great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:19-20) is three fold: (1) Go and make disciples; (2) Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; (3) Teach them to observe all things God has commanded. In this third area the churches join in cooperative endeavor as well as in the first. In Christian education, the B.M.A.A. performs its work in two areas. First, through a publication ministry, literature is published for use in Sunday school, Training Service (now Christian Growth), youth work, Women's Missionary Auxiliary, etc. Literally thousands of dollars are spent each year in this ministry. Second, many state associations have colleges which they support through the denominational organization. In the national work, one theological seminary is in operation in Jacksonville, Texas. Many (including Director of Publications and Seminary President), teachers, writers, and other helpers lead in the educational phase of the work of our Association. As you support the Association through your church offerings, you have a part in this ministry.

3. The churches cooperate in the area of missions-home and foreign. Paul writes to the Corinthian church that he had received wages from other churches while serving them. There was a missionary spirit and support in the early New Testament church, II Corinthians 11:8. Our churches still continue this work. Through the offerings contributed to the B.M.A.A, a mission program is carried on through Interstate missionaries in the United States and through Foreign missionaries in other lands. Already our association is well past the one million dollar mark (\$1,000,000.00) in her offerings to interstate and foreign missions since her organization in 1950.

The program of the association and the quality of men on the fields are such that the full support of each church is merited. Try to lead your church to give monthly and to give a percentage of her offerings to missions through the association. This is the greatest work in the world.

CONCLUSION—The only basis upon which churches may cooperate is doctrinal agreement. While the members may join in certain moral issues (as against narcotics and beverage alcohol), the church must be careful against alliance with non-believers. Paul says those who preach another doctrine must be accursed, Galatians 1:6-9. Again, he admonishes that those who hold contrary doctrines must be avoided, Romans 16:17-18. It is right and proper for churches to join with other sister churches of like faith and order in a unified effort to promote the Lord's cause. Churches who are members of associations should give their most loyal support to their association so long as the Kingdom of God is being advanced.

QUESTIONS

1. Define “church.”
2. How do associations of churches strengthen their work?
3. What is the correct name of the local, state, and national association with which your church cooperates?
4. List and briefly discuss the blessings which come through cooperation of churches.
5. What do we mean by equality of churches, sovereignty of a church, and equal representation?
6. Is it scriptural for churches to join in associations? Give reasons to support your answer.
7. In what areas do churches cooperate in their work?
8. What place does your church have in benevolence, education, and missions?
9. Why is it important that churches in any particular association should agree in doctrine?

“Every one hundred wage earners in a church should be able to support at least one missionary, besides supporting the local church program.”

—From GOD'S PECULIAR PEOPLE.