



“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: To study Articles 18, 19, and 20 of our Doctrinal Statement.

L322. Date: November 1969. **Text:** II Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-19, 23, 24; Romans 16:17, 18. **Topic:** Church: Cooperation of; Doctrine: Studies In.

INTRODUCTION—I'm glad it's not all up to my church alone! How helpless we would be trying to support a program of missions, education, benevolence and publications if no others helped us.

Because of the need for joint effort in these areas of ministry, independent congregations of the Lord have voluntarily joined in cooperative efforts. Thus pooling their resources and counsel they greatly extended their outreach.

The term “cooperation” suggests “joint effort.” “Church cooperation” pictures several local congregations joining their efforts to reach a desired goal or perform a desired service. Such a group of churches is called an “association.”

Your church is probably a member of a district association of churches, a state association of churches and a National association of churches. Without such agencies your testimony would probably be limited to your local community. Through these associations you can witness in neighboring towns, across your state, throughout your nation, and even into foreign lands of the world.

If your church is a member of such an association, she should be a contributing member. “Money, prayer, counsel, personnel—contribute what you can, but contribute. It is not right for anyone to get a “free ride” when he could help in the work.

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many churches. It is published by the Baptist Publications Committee [now *DiscipleGuide Church Resources*]. This is the publishing arm of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. This Association is composed of approximately 2,000 Baptist churches associated together to get the gospel out into all the world.

EXPOSITION

I. BLESSINGS ATTENDANT TO COOPERATING CHURCHES

Read II Corinthians 8:1-4! Behold the blessings witnessed by churches in Macedonia because they joined hearts with churches in Palestine in a cooperative ministry.

1. Grace, verse 1. Drought and famine had struck Palestine during early New Testament years. Believers in the stricken area were suffering great need. Word came to the churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Under the leadership of the Apostle Paul, they resolved to receive a benevolent offering and send it to relieve the distress of believers in Jerusalem and environs.

Brethren in Macedonia responded most generously. From deep poverty and in the midst of great affliction, they gave such a liberal offering that Paul was hesitant to receive it at all, verses 3-4. But he saw it as a sign of God's grace upon them. This "grace" is seen in their willingness to give sacrificially, their concern for others even though they were suffering, their great joy in the Holy Spirit, and the commendation of God upon them.

And so it has always been. Often through liberal offerings for missions, or a benevolent ministry at home, churches have experienced revival and renewed growth. This is a "grace" which accompanies cooperative ministries.

2. Joy, verse 2. "Abundance of joy" marked the offering of the Macedonian believers as they joined hands with their brethren in Christ.

The joy of the churches in Macedonia was not determined by the amount of each congregation's offering. Each one gave as much as she could and rejoiced as much as any other. Each one which bore a proportionate share of the work rejoiced as much as any other one. No one could have supplied all the needs of the Jerusalem brethren. But each one doing what she could did supply that need. And they all rejoiced. Many have found it easy to quit criticizing when they begin helping; they begin rejoicing

instead.

3. Sacrifice, verses 3-4. The churches in Macedonia needed the money they collected to send to Jerusalem. They could have used it at home. But they were totally unselfish. They were willing to suffer further personal privations if the needs of more straitened brethren could be supplied.

What a lesson for churches to learn! Many churches become so concerned about their local community that they lose a vision of world need. They hasten to start a visitation program in a new addition to their city when there are whole nations in the world where not one Christian witness is visiting. The church has sufficient man-power to meet the need at home. She must learn to sacrifice to get the gospel into areas where others have never heard.

4. Opportunity. Associations of churches give opportunity for each congregation to share in a world-wide ministry. But just being a member is not enough. There must be support of the ministry of mutual concern.

A church is not a cooperating member of an association of churches unless she supports the program of that association. Surely no congregation wants to live off the contributions of others. She wants to help support the publications, educational, benevolent, and missionary ministry of the group.

Associations of churches give opportunity for a balanced program, too. There will naturally be some phase of work which is closer to the hearts of some than are other phases. But a church cannot afford to support one part and neglect the rest. This would be like a parent feeding one child while requiring others to suffer need. A cooperating church will take advantage of the opportunity to support the total program so that we may get the gospel out in the shortest possible time.

II. SCRIPTURAL EQUALITY OF COOPERATING CHURCHES

Read II Corinthians 8:13-19, 23-24, looking for the idea of equality between the churches to be expressed there. It is not clearly stated but everywhere inferred.

1. Equal responsibility, verses 13-15. There is a tendency for us to pass the burden of support on to others. A poor church member may say, "Let the wealthy member pay the expenses." The smaller church may say; "Let the big churches pay the costs." The Apostle Paul says, "Let everyone share in bearing the cost. Let the poor as well as the wealthy member give. Let the small as well as the large church give." Everyone will be blessed as he bears his part of the load. Each one is equal in responsibility.

2. Equal authority, verses 16-19. A large amount of money was collected to take to poor saints in Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul did not wish to handle these funds alone lest questions should arise. So “a brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches” (that is, a highly respected brother) was “chosen of the churches” (selected by their vote) to travel with Paul and administer these funds. Each church expressed her voice in selecting the brother so entrusted.

This is what we do today. Messengers of the churches gather in designated places at set times to consider the cooperative work. They authorize certain brethren to handle funds to write literature, to teach in schools, to go to mission fields, etc. In these deliberations, each member-church of the Baptist Missionary Association of America is strictly equal. Each church has three messengers to represent her. So no big “I” and little “you” can control the system.

3. Equal representation, verses 23-24. One sent on a mission by the messengers of the churches of an association is no more the representative of one church than of another. He is the servant of all the churches sending him. He does not bow to one congregation because of its large offerings nor disdain another because it is small. Even the church where he holds membership is but one of several to which he accounts under God. Thus there is guaranteed equality among the churches.

4. Equal independency. Some Baptist congregations have not joined any association of churches because they wish to be “independent.” That is fine if a church so desires. But the idea is built upon one-false promise.

Independent and sovereign churches submit themselves to one another in brotherly love and confidence. Each church is free to join or to withdraw at her will. There is no loss of independence or autonomy as a New Testament church through such association. Is your church active in an association of missionary Baptist churches?

III. BALANCED MINISTRY OF COOPERATING CHURCHES

Most of the churches which use this Sunday School quarterly which you are reading is associated with the Baptist Missionary Association of America. This association was formerly called the North American Baptist Association but the name was changed in April, 1969, because of confusion with another Baptist group of a similar name. Several areas of cooperation are available through this Association.

1. Benevolence. — Offerings mentioned in I Corinthians 16:1-4 and II

Corinthians 8, 9 were received for benevolent purposes to aid drought-stricken people. Churches in Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia cooperated. This would include churches like the ones in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and others.

Our churches also support childrens' homes and care for the aged. We have a medical ministry to help the sick. We believe this is a part of serving Jesus. The Apostle James 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. This kind of ministry is greatly enlarged by cooperative efforts of the several churches.

2. Education. — The Great Commission of Jesus recorded in Matthew 28:19-20 sets out a three-fold challenge: make disciples, baptize converts and teach the saved.

The Christian Education ministry takes several forms. It is a parent teaching his child the things of God in the home. It is the church instructing others through a Sunday School and Training Service. It is the association of churches publishing true-to-the-Bible literature and distributing it for others to read and study. It is the association of churches establishing and supporting educational institutions which instruct in liberal arts while holding close to the Christian faith and practice.

You can have a part in this work. Be concerned about your family. Attend your church's educational ministry each week. Give your offerings to support the educational institutions of your associations of churches.

3. Missions. — Missionary evangelism at home and abroad is the greatest challenge given to the churches. Their field is “all the world;” their prospective converts are “every creature.” We believe this is our obligation under God.

Through various associations of churches the witness of Jesus is spread through our cities and towns in most states in the United States. Through the associated efforts of our churches the witness is spread abroad throughout the world. Today my church is helping support missionaries in Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay, Cape Verde Islands, Africa, Portugal, France, Japan, Italy, Formosa, Canada, and Australia. We could never do it all by ourselves. But in joint effort with sister churches, our witness reaches around the world.

If you are interested in having a part of this world-wide missions ministry, write the Baptist Missionary Association of America, 9219 Sibley Hole Road, Little Rock, Arkansas 72209. You will be pleased to associate in such a worthy project with other Christians who compose Baptist churches

which believe the Bible, are concerned about souls, and have dedicated themselves to world evangelism.

CONCLUSION—Is it really permissible for a church to join in cooperative work with other churches to support missions, education, publications, and benevolence? It is not only permissible, it is advisable!

No church suffers in loss of sovereignty or independence by such an association. The New Testament churches evidently cooperated in such projects. So may we.

There is strength in the unity of congregations just as there is strength in the unity of individuals. This lesson on “Church Cooperation” has sought to set out the advantages of such association and unity to encourage your church to give her utmost effort in support of Bible-believing associations whose purpose is to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Has this aim been realized in you?