

BULLETIN

SEMINARY EXTENSION

DEPARTMENT

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BAPTIST UNITY: HOW, WHY, WHAT

Many of our papers are calling for Baptist unity. Some have gone so far as to say that this unity must be achieved at all cost. What is meant by "Baptist unity"? Do we mean that we hope to arrive at a point in which we all react alike to identical situations? Do we mean that we can take any environment at any pressure and put the Baptist message up against that pressure and environment and come out with the same approach and with the same interpretation? Or do we imply that we accept the errors and mistakes of others in the realization that we also make them? And do we mean that there is common ground sufficient for unity despite differences? Does it admit that wide variances are possible for sincere thinkers?

Baptist unity cannot be achieved by smothering all voices but one. Baptists would split into many factions if the attempt was made to try to force us all into one mold. Too often it appears that those who want this Baptist unity want it at the price of silence. If we ever get to the place where Baptists are silent on issues, we will deteriorate. I am in thorough agreement that we ought to have unity, but it ought to be defined as a spirit of willingness to disagree in friendliness.

If Southern Baptists had to have a split for each faction, they would thoroughly disintegrate. This is not a matter to be settled by the Convention, however; for our conventions are not churches. They have no right to be theological credal fellowships. They must remain

missionary agencies. If we can keep this in mind, we can have unity which means really that we agree on the method of work. It would be extremely difficult to find a single doctrine on which there is a unanimous voice. And to take one point of view and carry it into all sections of the Convention propagating it as if it were the only position held by Baptists is to violate every principle of Baptist concepts.

Baptists should be seeking to find a way to enlarge their cooperative efforts and fellowships so as to include rather than to exclude. Our Baptist forefathers were to some degree credal in their thinking, and a creed which would be gentle enough so as not to stifle investigation might be acceptable. But we can never force Baptists into a single mold.

Do we not also need to ask if Baptists do not have some responsibility regarding the unity of the spirit with others who believe in our Christ? We have maintained all along that we can have Christian unity without affiliation. To maintain such is to demand that we prove that such unity is possible. While we seek for unity let us also seek for the method that will bring it about. And let us so define it as to permit individuality if we want to preserve what we now think of as our Baptist way of life.

STATISTICAL REPORT

Correspondence students	1,817
Extension Center students	3,519
Total	<u>5,336</u>

Now is the time to prepare for the fall semester of your center. Publicize the work in your area.

"YOU CAN'T TURN AROUND"

Thus read the sign on a narrow mountainous road where I traveled this spring. When I hear much of the discussion now current in some religious circles, this sign comes to my mind. The only sort of progress is straight ahead. We cannot undo discovery. If the findings in the Dead Sea caves produce a text of Isaiah which varies from the "received text," the translators will have to take it into account. If discoveries in natural science conflict with opinions, the opinions, not natural science, are on the spot. Where inductive investigation results in discoveries, there is nothing to do but face up to them.

Many theories relative to Bible history, text, and teachings have been passed down to us as traditions of the Christian faith which were bound to come into conflict with the phenomena of investigation. Those who have given their whole assent to these theories were bound to be affected by the results of science and its investigation. For an example of what this means, look at the first chapter of Genesis. According to this chapter as tradition has interpreted it, the vast universe was born in 144 hours. Science has proved that such a momentary creation is highly improbable. Science has some very safe rules by which it can judge the age of imbedded fossils and life remains of other matter in rock and slate. These layers of rock were made gradually and over a period of eons. The scientist does no disservice by pointing out these facts. Science in its real mission fulfills God's design. Scientific discoveries are part and parcel of revelation--Divine revelation. Our world is compatible with investigation, reason, and logic. Faith is not a repudiation of reason but is collative with reason. Reason and investigation cannot be shut out of revelation and faith, for when men think even with what is commonly called anti-reason, they reason. What is absolute, what is probable, what is improbable, what is finite must arise in one's contact with what is true. Faith may be childish and ill-founded, and yet serve the believer. But once the character of the faith is discovered, it comes under the searchlight of reason.

The advances in our knowledge of the text of the Bible, of teaching, and of philosophy of the religion we know resulted from the

process of reason and investigation. Reason and investigation have broken down many immature concepts in Christianity. These twins have up-set many theories. But neither reason nor investigation have been up-set. Once a fact is learned, it cannot be unlearned. "You cannot turn back."

It is true that in the fields of science and philosophy many men have acted hastily. Some have come up with theories prematurely based upon insufficient evidence. Many honest mistakes have been made. The relationship which an artifact may actually have with certain accepted data may not be the same as the scientist claims. The relationship which certain scientific truth may have toward scripture may also be overstated. For as theologians do not always understand science, so scientists do not always understand theology.

The last thing a preacher should fear is the conflict between science and scripture. Creating the best in scriptural knowledge falls within the range of science. When a fact of science is discovered the preacher may have to give close scrutiny to scripture.

Is the Bible then at the mercy of science? No. The Bible is not at the mercy of science; it is within the range of scientists. And whatever science contributes should be welcomed. We are indebted to scientists for initiating objective research into biblical fields. But scientists cannot, with his tools, break into some areas of religious claims. One scientist claimed that he could not find God through a telescope. New marvels are seen in chemistry, physics, and electronics; but none of these have the instruments for communicating with God. Man has split the atom but God is not physically embodied in the atom.

Harmonizing science and scripture is a favorite pastime of many. But even this is not the great task. For sometimes the presuppositions of the harmonizers are faulty, both in science and in scripture. It rather behooves the preacher to preach fearlessly and with conviction the great truths of the Bible while sitting at the feet of science as a learner. These are parallels that must remain parallels; they cannot be resolved with the information now available.
