

Dangers and Duties of Present Hour

OPENING ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT E. Y. MULLINS

The Southern Baptist Convention, Kansas City, Mo., May 16, 1923

has seemed to me wise at the opening of our Convention to call attention to some of the dangers which lurk along the way of our work, and some of the imperative duties which confront us. First, I name a few of the dangers:

1. First of all, I mention the danger of the possibility of division among us over secondary questions. Southern Baptists have attained to a remarkable degree of unity. This has been manifest in our work in the \$75,000,000 Campaign and otherwise. It is perhaps the greatest single asset we have at the present time on the practical side of our efforts. We can accomplish nothing without unity. It would be exceedingly unfortunate, therefore, if we were to divide over the question of pre-millennialism or post-millennialism. There is no issue among us over the question of the personal return of Jesus Christ to this earth. We all accept that as a fixed teaching of the New Testament. We all look forward to it as a glorious hope. We are all loyal to it. And there should be no division over the order of events which will occur when Christ returns.

If a man says to me, I believe that Christ will come before the millenium and reign personally on earth a thousand years, I can say to him, "Give me your hand of fellowship; we have no quarrel." If another brother says, "I believe the world will grow better gradually and there will be a thousand years of millenial blessedness, and then Christ will come," I can say to him, "Give me your hand of fellowship; we have no quarrel." If a third brother comes and says, "I do not know whether Christ will reign personally on earth, or whether there will be a thousand years of blessedness prior to his coming; only I believe that he will come in his own time," I can say to him, "Give me your hand. I have no quarrel with you." Southern Baptists would be very foolish to permit this issue to divide them.

Again, there is no division among us on the question of the supernatural in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe in the virgin birth of Christ, his deity, his substitutionary atonement, his resurrection from the dead and his second coming. We believe in salvation by grace through faith. We believe in the coming of a divine power into human life to redeem man from guilt and the power of sin. We are against naturalism and any form of rationalistic philosophy which denies the supernatural. Here we must plant our feet. On this we must insist for all teachers in our colleges and seminaries. This is the standard by which we must measure ourselves. We favor science, but we are against the anti-religious assumptions of so-called science. We are in favor of freedom of research, but not at the expense of the established facts of religion. In my view, the only requirement we can make of our teachers is that they be loyal to the above supernatural facts of the gospel. There may be variations in the way in which they state their positions on other matters. There is room for difference of opinion on many themes. There is room for difference of opinion on the great fundamental verities. Let us make this the cardinal point—loyalty to the supernatural in the gospel of Christ. Let us not be divided on subordinate variations of opinion.

2. A second danger confronting us is the possibility of the confusion of thought as to the place and work of the Southern Baptist Convention. There has been considerable discussion of this matter. We need to clarify our function and our work. The Convention is called to a great mission. Its organization and work are precisely like those of other general Baptist bodies. All Baptist organizations are under the control of the same fundamental Baptist principle which governs in our churches. A district association is a voluntary association of Baptists who are self-governing and with obligations to carry on certain lines of work pertaining to its own sphere of activity, and it is morally bound in its obligations to other Baptist bodies, but it is under the control of no other Baptist body. Its obligations are directly to Jesus Christ himself, and its relations to other Baptist bodies are purely moral; they are not legal. These are precisely the same characteristics found in the Southern Baptist Convention. It is a voluntary organization, self-governing, and under obligation to Christ to plan its own work, make out its own program, and pursue its own purposes. It is, of course, morally bound, like a district association, to consider its relations to all other free Baptist bodies, to embody the fraternal Baptist spirit, to confer and seek common ground in common work. But within its own sphere, fixed by its own purposes, it is a free, self-determining, independent body. These principles may be applied

to all other general Baptist bodies, state conventions, unions, and every other form of Baptist organization. Baptists should never introduce legal bonds, making their general organizations in any sense dependent upon each other in any compulsory way. Our danger is that we will convert moral and fraternal obligations into legal relations. It would be a sad day for Southern Baptists if the Southern Baptist Convention should surrender its autonomy or merge its work in the work of any other Baptist bodies in the world above or below.

3. A third danger is the failure to appreciate the tremendous gains of the \$75,000,000 Campaign. The gains of that campaign, in vision, in morale, in the demonstration of the possibility of unity in our democratic church policy, in the capacity of a free people to co-operate successfully for the great ends of the kingdom, and in many other ways, are of incalculable value to us. Let us not fail to estimate truly the value of these gains. We must not over-emphasize our mistakes. We have made great mistakes. If I were disposed to dwell upon mistakes, I might easily become pessimistic, because the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has, perhaps, suffered more than any other agency of the Convention in the ongoing of the Campaign. So far as the Campaign itself is concerned, the Seminary has derived, at the end of four years, less than 7 per cent of the total amount allotted to it from the Campaign itself. We have added to our treasury a somewhat greater sum, but the balance came to us from the collection of pledges already made, these having been secured by our own efforts prior to the Campaign. We have received from the Campaign proper less than \$100,000 out of a total of \$1,500,000 which was allotted to us.

But I am far from dwelling upon this. I believe in the brethren and in their willingness to make good to us what we have lost. The only thing to do with our mistakes is to capitalize them. They can teach us great lessons.

4. A fourth danger is the loss of ideals and courage for greater achievement. We face a great crisis in our history as a denomination. Failure at the present time would be disastrous in many ways, and will tend to depress our spirits in efforts to achieve hereafter.

But I have spoken sufficiently of the dangers. I wish now to call attention to some of the duties of the hour, and first I mention our duty to complete the task we now have in hand. We must not fail on the \$75,000,000 Campaign. The period has been extended until December, 1924. We have twenty months more in which to round out our great undertaking. If we succeed in this, it will mean great things for us. Wrapped up in our success are the following:

(1) Our standing in the religious world. We repudiated the Interchurch movement and set out to do our own work in our own way. The eyes of the world have been upon Southern Baptists since that day in 1919 when we took this step. Our success will add enormously to our prestige, and our failure will cause Baptist stock to go down in the estimation of men and women.

(2) Our own faith and courage for future tasks. If we win out in the campaign we are now engaged in, nothing will be too great for us in the future. The only spirit in which to meet it is the spirit of David when he went to meet Goliath. He remembered God's deliverances in the past and had firm faith in the success of his attack upon the giant.

(3) The demonstration of the efficiency of religious democracy. Southern Baptists have been demonstrating that a religious democracy is capable of compact organization and effective co-operation, but this demonstration will be largely a failure if our effort breaks down, and if the objective is not attained. Those who believe in centralized church government, with overlords and bishops, do not think Baptists are capable of high achievement in such efforts. They have freely predicted that we will fail. We must disappoint them by the performance of our great task.

2. Another duty is to begin great plans for the future. The highest rewards which God bestows upon his people for tasks achieved is still greater tasks. We ought to begin at the present meeting to plan what we are going to do in our next great movement.

3. We should renew our allegiance to the Great Commission. The center of our Baptist life is in the commission. Our work begins with evangelism; it reaches out to education, to philanthropy, to social service, to civic righteousness. Our task is to build up the kingdom of God in all these respects, but as Baptists understand their work, they begin with the renewal of the individual heart through the grace of God. We preach a gospel which goes directly after the salvation of the indi-

vidual, and out of the regenerate life we believe all good things in the social order will follow. Evangelism, therefore, is the keynote at home and abroad. Our hospitals, our orphanages, our colleges and theological seminaries and all other phases of our Baptist life and activity follow as an inevitable consequence.

Sometimes a young preacher asks me how much he shall vary his message from the strictly evangelistic message in preaching. My reply is that the evangelistic note should never be absent, though there may be many variations in the theme. When I was a child I could pick out a tune on the piano with one finger so you could recognize it was the tune of "Home, Sweet Home." But I have heard Paderewski play "Home, Sweet Home" with variations. He used ten fingers and the entire keyboard of the piano, and yet at every stage of the piece as he played it the tune of "Home, Sweet Home" was recognized. He played it with variations. So also there is evangelism which may be likened to the playing with one finger, and there is preaching which is like the playing of Paderewski with all the fingers, and yet the tune is always there.

4. Our duty is to renew the vision of 1919. It was a great hour in Atlanta when we stood together voting the great undertaking. The spirits of all the great leaders of the past, if they were permitted to be present, must have rejoiced with joy unspeakable as they heard what was said and witnessed the scene of that memorable night in Atlanta. We need to come back to that high mountain top and look abroad over the earth again and catch a vision of the coming kingdom of God, and rededicate ourselves to the great tasks with all the fervor of our souls.

My mind goes out today to the suffering European humanity is agonizing in its hunger and need for the gospel of Jesus Christ. A newspaper writer the other day who had traveled all over Europe pictured the situation as follows:

Looking at Europe as a whole, this writer said: In the West people are fighting their own race—their own brothers. They say it is in the cause of liberty. Each side is trying to suppress the other by extermination. In truth, they hate; and how they hate. This is Ireland.

Half way between West and East people are starving, defeated, sore at heart, defenseless, sullen. The pride of a nation is being trampled under foot. The people are dreaming of a day to come when they will be avenged, when they will get weapons in their hands and fight and kill. And that is Germany. Oh, how they hate!

Further East is a great suffering world that God seems to have abandoned and that has renounced God. Indeed, the government has definitely decreed that it will exterminate religion and drive all believers out. They are a great people, enduring great suffering. They also dream of a great day to come when their enemies will be at their feet. And this is Russia.

And in the East, across the Hellespont, there is a world of chaos, a nation defeated, struggling to rise out of its ashes, to recreate itself, throbbing with a great grievance and inflamed with a great spirit of revenge. And that is Turkey.

And in the midst of this Turkish people, full of venom and hate and cruelty, I can see long columns of pitiful orphan children, under the guidance of Red Cross workers, children of Christian parents, marching in all directions to places of refuge and safety from the pitiless cruelty of their enemies. And this is Armenia and the Armenians.

Europe is thus a scene of desolation. This newspaper writer gives a marvellous interpretation. She says: No autocrat can ever bring back peace and prosperity to Europe. Democracy cannot bring to Europe what Europe needs. Even a League of Nations, by itself, cannot do this. She said that after talking with many leaders of thought, professors, ministers and others, there was one verdict. The only possible salvation for Europe is a spiritual revival. There is only one cure for the dreadful disease of these countries, and that is the coming of God's Spirit and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Europe, she said, is a graveyard, desolate everywhere, without a single lily.

And as we look abroad over the earth, similar conditions prevail, and thus the vision of duty, the vision of sin, and the vision of God are made clear to us. Let us humbly and reverently and devotedly recognize God's call to us to go out into this suffering world with the only remedy—the gospel of the grace of God.

DUTY OF THE STRONG.—We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.—Romans 15:1.