

Vital Essentials

WORTH PRESERVING
AND PERPETUATING



*"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid,
which is Jesus Christ."—I Corinthians 3:11.*

S. B. C. HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Without boast or pride but with joy and certainty, Baptists trace their lineage back to an ancient and honorable beginning—to the meeting of John the forerunner and Jesus in the holy baptizing scene in the Jordan River. Through the centuries, sometimes by indistinct lines, sometimes by definite groups and mighty doctrines, they profess love for and loyalty to teachings and principles which Christ gave to the apostolic group and are recorded in the New Testament. They have sought to track Christ's model of life, teaching, doctrine, method, and spirit as found in the New Testament. They have almost universally for nineteen hundred years accepted, faithfully proclaimed, and courageously defended Christ's supernatural birth, his holy life, his substitutionary death, his bodily resurrection, his visible return, his eternal intercession as the Redeemer of the world, the Son of God, and the Lord of his people. They have accepted his inspired and inspiring Book as the Father's and his will, his authority of his church and churches, his placement of the ordinances. They have believed in New Testament individualism, the competency and adequacy of the soul under God, the freedom of conscience, the separation of church and state, the lordship and saviourhood of Christ, his Commission to save individuals, and his command to his churches to assume the obligation for the evangelization and education of all the world.

In the period in which we now live, so great has been the Baptist contribution to civilization, missions, education, and evangelism, to the great underlying foundations of intellectual, civil, and religious

growth, and to international Christianity, that they have become in numbers and strength the largest evangelical group in the world—more than twelve millions. So great have been the number of baptisms and additions to our churches, so strong our protest against wrong and the foes of God, so mighty our battle against dictators, aristocracies, hierarchical ecclesiastics, totalitarian states and churches, and so large our growth, strength, and spread in missions, that we are now in the peak of our spiritual achievements in all the past of our history.

God has brought us thus far in order to lead us further on to larger world conquests in Christ's redeeming kingdom. Will we falter, fail, go backward, stand still, or go forward with mightier strides under the commanding orders and redeeming leadership of our risen Lord? Shall we live in and glory in the past triumphs, or with resolute courage, far-seeing vision, apostolic zeal, Pentecostal unity and power, and conquering faith go forward and win other and larger victories for Christ?

With these introductory words, I call your attention, briefly, to five vital fundamentals, the observance and conquest of which are essential to the triumph of our cause. These must be preserved and perpetuated.

1. *The Christlike, sacrificial spirit, in the face of a most selfish and sinful worldwide indulgence.* The heart of Christ's ministry is summed up in the words "sacrifice" and "sacrificial." He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Christianity has taken Christ's sacrifice for our salvation and missed his sacrifice in our life of self-centrality. We have

betrayed and crucified his most glorious challenge to self-denial, and we are living far too indulgent, self-pleasing and easy lives, satisfying our appetites, our passions, our worldly ambitions, and hence losing the power of our witness to a lost world.

Christ's disciples and many modern missionaries and others know the cost of service in self-denial and suffering, but the mass of our church members today know nothing of it. If Christianity wins the world's foes and lives today, we must show more of the crucifixion of self and more of the enthronement of Christ, with his sacrificial motives. There are many examples of the sacrificial in the past and on mission fields today that rebuke us for our selfishness and sinful indulgence. The examples of most of us today do not give witness to the Christian life, and we are falling away from the examples that Christ and the apostles set for us. Many of us are orthodox in our professions but selfish and sinful in our lives.

What is the difference today between the worldly indulger, with all the ease and luxury and comforts and sinful society, and the ordinary church member? The margin line is far too thin and the semblance far too great. The costly expenses of our ease, pleasures, appetites, and passions are very expensive to the deeper vitalities and higher conquests of the Christian life. Commercialized pleasures and worldly indulgences today are costing Christianity, in its saving, exemplifying, and mighty power, an untold world of woe and sorrow and disappointment. If I could, I would call us all back to the more sacrificial in living and giving and witnessing, in order that we might give to the world a pure model and sample in the fine art of life, and that we

might become a more powerful dynamic in winning the world to Christ.

2. *Constructive conviction and unshakable loyalty to fundamental principles in the face of a unionizing and compromising world.* This is a matter that needs our attention and our universal co-operation. The question is whether we shall follow God or man across the line of New Testament fundamentals. Unionism is in the air; its advocates are loud and everywhere. And in this popularizing, unionizing atmosphere our people need to do some very fine discrimination and study in the fundamentals and defend them with great courage of conviction.

We should rejoice in the fact that Christian people everywhere are drawing nearer and nearer together and seeking with great concern to find the will of Christ and the answer to his prayer for oneness and unity. But we, as Baptists, because of our historic stand for distinctive doctrines, need to study ourselves and restudy our fundamentals, with the purpose and hope that in so far as loyalty to truth will allow we shall try to discover the right answer of Christ's prayer. So far as we can, we should discriminate between conviction and prejudice and age-long biases, not with the idea of giving up our convictions, but with the idea of clarifying our conceptions of the truth, and we should do our best to match our views with the true interpretation of the doctrines of God's Word. In doing this we must learn the lessons of history as to unification and compromise on the basis of false ideas and principles. We must grow our courtesies but not at the expense of our convictions.

Baptists have not made their doctrines. We claim that they were handed down by a divine Lord

through an inspired Bible, and that it is not our duty to remake them or change them, but our duty to know them, love them, live for them, proclaim them, and, if need be, die for them.

The Christians of the world need not only to get together to do the will of Christ, but they need pre-eminently to get together on Christ's way of getting together and staying together, as set out in the New Testament. The world needs to learn that the best things of the world have come to us today because of certain great, unfaltering, heroic leaders of the past who refused to bow their knees to Baal.

The question is, Shall we unite with those who are committed to certain matters that are contrary to the genius and fundamentals of our faith, contention for the principles of which has made Baptists the most powerful evangelical group in Christian history today?

There are certain lines, deep as life, set out in our guide book, the Bible, across which we must not go. How far can we go with those who hold the sacramental idea in the ordinances, union of church and state, authoritative lordship in ecclesiasticism (rejecting the competency of the soul under God in all things religious), baptismal regeneration, salvation by works rather than by grace, totalitarianism in state and church—those who will close our churches and imprison our people and seek to placate us with a false form of union?

Wherever and whenever Baptists have compromised and sacrificed New Testament principles for any reason, they have lost, because they weakened their base and forfeited the fortifying and multiplying favor of God. We must show the courtesy of our

convictions, but not sell our convictions for courtesy or fellowship. We must refeed and renourish the roots of loyalty, stand with united front against the encroachments of compromise, and raise up another generation who are willing to go to prison and die there or burn at the fagot.

My plea is for discrimination, conscience, conviction, courage, as well as for the most glorious Christian courtesy and loving fellowship. But we should found our union and our fellowship in the ground and rock foundations of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was no trimmer. Paul was no compromiser. They followed the plain, defined path to crucifixion and prisons—and death. We can do no less!

We must reteach and reimpress our doctrines and standards, and implant courageous convictions in the hearts of our young people, and establish the reasons for our loyalties, if we are to maintain our aggressiveness and power to win men and to build Christ's kingdom. Courageous, courteous loyalty to New Testament principle is an eternal essential to satisfactory, permanent, and perpetual conquest in the way of Christ's will and way.

If salvation is by grace without works; if the lordship of Christ is the only lordship in the New Testament; if democracy in church government is the only New Testament method; if immersion of a believer in water is the only baptism; if there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; if the plain truth in the New Testament is that ordinances are ordinances and not sacraments with meritorious power in Christ's teaching of them; if the priesthood of all believers is the New Testament teaching, rather than apostolic succession of ecclesiastical overlord-

ships; if the individual Christian in religion has a full competency under God and all the rights under Christ's way instead of taking a detour mapped by men,—then let us forever hold to these principles.

3. *The doctrine of a free church in a free state and the competency of the soul in religion, under God.*

The battle for the freedom of the soul and the liberty of conscience was never more raging nor the issue more imperiled than in this day. The doctrine of the separation of church and state is meeting its mightiest foes today—witness atheistic communism, totalitarian dictatorships, civil persecutions in many lands, the encroachment on the spirit of the Bill of Rights in proposals in the United States Congress and certain of the state capitals in the effort of certain church movements to secure taxes for church purposes. One-half of the wars of the ages past and the troubles of today were and are generated because of the violation of the doctrines for which Christ died in Jerusalem, for which Paul was beheaded in Rome, for which Bunyan suffered in Bedford, for which Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts, for which our Baptist forefathers suffered in jails in Virginia, and for which Baptist preachers today are put in jail in Central Europe and Jews are raped and robbed in many places on the earth.

There are yet many shackles that must be broken, many prisons that must be opened, and many enthroned overlords that must be down before we shall follow Christ's command, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." We must reform our lines, rebuild our loyalties, and make up our mind, if need be, that we will go courageously and with

songs of victory to prison, before we shall suffer and endure the things that are being brought on us by those who would take away the heritage of our people, in the amalgamation of church and state, the crucifixion of conscience, and the right of every soul to full access to God in all things religious. This is the battle of evangelism and missions at the heart. The gospel must have an open road to the souls of men everywhere if Christ is to be the Redeemer of the world.

4. *The efficiency of our local churches and the democracy of our associated churches adequately to supply the consecrated, trained men and women and stewardship money to build Christ's worldwide kingdom.* Can we organize our Baptist polities, policies, and forces under the New Testament example of church and denominational leadership sufficiently to take the world for Christ? Baptists believe that their New Testament churches and their voluntary association of churches into a larger organization, without ecclesiastical overlordship, fits the pattern of New Testament organization and is, on the basis of voluntariness of free, saved souls, the most effective of all organizations to accomplish the ends of Christ's command and kingdom. Their growth into the largest group of evangelical Christians in the world and their remarkable progress in the last few years go to prove that this is so.

Where lies our supreme weakness? Not in evangelism, not in numbers, not in democracy of organization. Where, then? I think it is in the lack of intensity and organization for enlistment, training for service, and stewardship of money. The following tragic figures must be changed. Someone has stated the following about Southern Baptists: 5 per

cent of us do not exist; 10 per cent cannot be found; 25 per cent never attend church; 50 per cent never give; 90 per cent never tithe; 90 per cent never attend prayer meeting; 95 per cent never win a soul. It takes twenty-three Baptists throughout the South on an average of one year to baptize one soul. The average of per capita gifts is very humiliating in the face of what another denomination, many times smaller than we, is doing per capita. These shameful figures must be changed. We must put on and keep up perpetually an intensive, Southwide movement to enlist every member in all the life and activities of our churches and the worldwide kingdom, teaching them God's Word and loyalty to his commands. We must bring them to the tithing basis, with freewill offerings, according to God's financial plan, that we may greatly enlarge our Co-operative Program, pay our debts, reinforce our seminaries, colleges, and other institutions with adequate endowment, and multiply our mission forces at home and abroad. We have the numbers, the leadership, the organization, the promised power of God, the gospel, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and we are sinners and defaulters and worse unless we do it.

I trust that the denomination in days ahead will continue to emphasize, and through a long crusading period of years, put heavy emphasis upon soul-winning—organizing, inspiring, and training in evangelism. I trust that we shall seek to reclaim "the lost tribe of the house of Israel," bringing into active service in all the lines of life and labor our members, all of them, train our young, enlist all the areas of our denominational life, until we have an army with all the armament of the gospel going

forward to conquer, and seek to take speedily this generation and the world for Christ.

5. *The mastery of the evangelistic in the evangelical.*

It is not enough to be evangelical, either our preachers, our churches, our deacons, our teachers, our schools, our denomination—all. We ought to major and master in a constructive, impassioned evangelism. There is where Christ put the emphasis. That is the explanation of the missionary triumphs of Paul and the apostolic group. Christ's commands, commission, aim, essential purpose, and program for his churches was to be evangelistic, heartfully and soulfully winning the lost all the time—not merely to pride themselves upon a dignified evangelism. We need to win men to Christ—rather than glory in a holy name. "The son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Christ's first command to his disciples was, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Paul said, "I am made all things to all men that by all means I might save some." Paul and Christ were great teachers and trainers, but they were great winners. They practiced evangelism—church evangelism, teaching evangelism, domestic, personal, outdoor, indoor, highway, outside, wellside, pressing evangelism. So ought we!

Our evangelism must not be merely a campaign. It must be a perpetual crusade if we override the foes of the world and win lost men everywhere to Christ.

And in connection with this, and as a part of it, we must give great emphasis and perpetuity to the doctrine of the presence, and the necessity of the presence, of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in our evangelism and church work. We must

go back to Pentecost and learn the emergencies of Pentecost, the extraordinary things of Pentecost. We must learn that it was Christ's church that the Spirit used as the center of that mighty movement. We must learn that they had extraordinary praying, remarkable preaching, preaching based on the cross and the empty tomb, and unusual personal work; every man had the flame of the power on his head and heart and was a personal soul-winner. And after Pentecost they went afield everywhere—into the desert roads, through the hearts of the cities and the country sides, tackled hard and difficult men—the Nicodemuses, the scarlet women at the well, the dying thieves on the cross. They majored in great outdoor evangelism. We must learn that their spiritual compassion was as deep as the meaning of Christ's death and as agonizing as his Gethsemane experience. They had their souls in it, like Paul when he said, "I warned every man night and day for three years with tears and supplications." Their passion was extraordinary and their power was from heaven. You cannot think of Pentecost without thinking of extraordinary power, and if we are to repeat and perpetuate Pentecost we must rely on the Holy Spirit of God. He was the Father's gift to Christ and Christ's gift to us, to convince sinners of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He is our promised power today.

Baptists need to get out of functioning in their own circles only, out into the great open places, down into the hard and difficult places in the power of the Divine Spirit. My prayer, my program, for this great group of loyal disciples for Jesus Christ is to go forward in the doctrines, loyal in the fundamentals, under the leadership of Christ, with

the gospel in their hearts and hands, lost souls like the weight of a world on their hearts, and the power of the Divine Spirit upon their lives, to hasten the day when men everywhere shall love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ all the way to the fulness and completeness of his will.



