

Nashville Peace Meeting (1937)

Written by Various

The following principles of faith, or doctrine and practice, are hereby recommended as principles upon which the present disturbances among the Primitive Baptists in Tennessee and parts of Kentucky may be adjusted:

FIRST - THE DOCTRINE

We hereby re-affirm our solemn belief in the principles upon which our church, or churches, were constituted; which principles of doctrine we believe to be as stated in the following brief outline of principles:

1. We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are the perfectly inspired word of God, and the only infallible rule, or standard, of faith and practice; and that, as such, the Bible teaches all that we ought to know, believe, or practice religiously. It is just as wrong to practice what the Bible does not teach as it is to leave undone what is expressly commanded therein. Both are wrong.

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2. We believe in the existence, immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, and eternal perfections of the one only true and living God, who exists in the three-fold, yet undivided and indivisible substance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; who was and is the sovereign Creator, Upholder, Preserver, Governor and Judge of the Universe.

3. We believe that God is omniscient - that is, He perfectly knows all things; He has never learned anything, nor has He ever forgotten anything.

4. We believe in the doctrine of total depravity - that is, the entire human family are justly condemned, all having sinned in Adam; and that our life received by virtue of the natural birth is poisoned with sin; and that in nature the man is sinful in all his parts, and all are dead in trespasses and in sins.

5. We believe in the eternal and personal and unconditional election of the saints unto glory; that they were chosen in Christ by the Father before the world was - before they had any actual existence; that God predestinated them unto the adoption of sons, and that they should be conformed to the image of His Son; and they will all be finally and ultimately saved in glory. However, we do solemnly deny that God predestinated sin. He has determined to overrule and punish sin. Those whom God has not, or did not, predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son are left to act in their own sins to their just condemnation, to the praise of God's glorious justice.

6. We believe that the atonement and the redemption of Jesus Christ are for the elect only, and that they are justified in the sight of God by the imputed righteousness of the Son alone.

7. We believe in the direct, immediate, sovereign, irresistible, and, in all cases, the effectual work of the Holy Spirit in calling, regenerating and sanctifying the elect of God, and that in His own appointed time and way. The work of regeneration is an instantaneous and internal work, and is accomplished by the work of the Spirit of God on the spirit of the sinner.

8. We believe in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead - that is, that the bodies of all who die will be raised at the final windup and consummation of all things. We mean by this that it is the body that dies, and it is the same body which dies that shall be raised from the dead. The bodies of the saints will, at the resurrection, be changed, made spiritual, immortal, and reunited with their souls, and taken into the glorious presence of the Lord, and their happiness will be unending. The others will be cast into eternal torment, and their punishment will be unending.

9. We believe that baptism and the Lord's supper are ordinances of Jesus Christ, and that true believers (those who have been born again) are the only proper subjects for baptism, and that Scriptural baptism is a burial in water; that the ordinances of the church are in the hands of the church for keeping; and that baptism is not valid unless administered by one authorized by a gospel church to administer the ordinances. Unleavened bread and wine (grape wine) are to be used in the Lord's supper. We believe that the washing of the saints' feet should be kept up and practiced in the church, whether it be called an ordinance or an example. We who engage in the practice should not fall out with each other as to what we call it - whether an ordinance or an example. We should practice it, and then observe what it teaches.

10. We believe that the Lord's children (those who have been born again) are under parental law to the blessed Lord, and that He has promised blessings in His word to His children who obey Him, which He has not promised to others, and that these blessings thus promised cannot be attained to or enjoyed any other way only by obeying Him - doing the things commanded by Him. On the other hand, He has promised chastisement - suffering, sorrow, trouble, and distress - upon their rebellion and disobedience. Have we not realized some of the latter, to our sorrow?

11. We believe that baptism is the first ordinance, and that no one has a right to the Lord's supper unless he has first been baptized by the proper authority, and is in order with his brethren at home. To participate in the communion service, or sacramental supper, with others, or otherwise, we deem to be disorderly. By this term "in order with his brethren at home," we do not simply mean with what may be designated as the band of his membership. One might have membership in a local body that is not in order.

12. We believe that a gospel church is a body of baptized believers, who have banded themselves together to keep house for the Lord, and who maintain the true principles of doctrine and practice as laid down in the New Testament. Yet a true church may err from the right way; and when they do so, the Scriptural injunction is for them to repent. The church was set up by the Saviour during His personal ministry on earth, and this church has an unbroken succession unto the present day, and it will remain on earth some place until our Lord's second personal coming. The Lord established His kingdom, or church, for a home for His little children. He gave all the laws and rules and regulations to govern in this kingdom. We have no right to make new laws; nor do we have a right to disobey or dishonor the laws which He gave. We believe that some of His laws are as follows, in matters of discipline:

DISCIPLINE

1. The foregoing articles on the doctrine express our views on the matter of baptism, the Lord's supper, and washing the saints' feet.

2. A private offense or trespass is where one member trespasses against another, or against others. A public offense, or an offense against the body, is where one's conduct is immoral, or of an immoral nature, and is detrimental to the church as a body, and not simply hurtful to an individual. A public offense hurts all the church, or all the brotherhood.

3. In cases of private offenses or trespasses, as one member against another, the offended party should go to the offender, in the right spirit, in the spirit of love, being sure not to take old Satan along with him, and endeavor to adjust the matter. If this fails to bring about reconciliation, he should then take with him one or two more, endeavoring to obtain reconciliation, or to reclaim the erring one. When reconciliation is thus not obtained, then it should be taken to the church. Then if the transgressing member will not hear the church, the church should withdraw fellowship from him, or from her; but this should be done in the spirit of love, and humility. Any person who has a grievance and tells others about it before having pursued the above course becomes a transgressor, and should, himself, be dealt with by the church. To tell others about the matter, instead of telling it to the transgressing brother, and endeavoring to reclaim him, as above outlined, is akin to rebellion and anarchy.

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4. There are some public offenses which the church may forgive or bear with; but some are of such a grievous nature that the church cannot bear with, and continue to retain her identity as a gospel church in order. In cases of minor offenses the offending brother should be labored with, and the brethren should patiently try to reclaim him. But if the offending party will not need the admonitions lovingly given, the church should withdraw fellowship from him.

5. In cases of gross infractions of immorality, the person should be withdrawn from and let him reform on the outside of the church. The church is not a reformatory. Such things as drunkenness, fornication, adultery, false swearing, perjury, and such like gross sins, should not be tolerated by the church in any of her members, whether the member be a private one, or a deacon, or a preacher. Really the church can better afford to retain a private member who is guilty of gross wrong, if any difference, because the minister is in public life as a representative of the church before the world.

6. If a member denies an accusation made only by outsiders, he should not be considered guilty unless a preponderance of creditable evidence is against him, which should be weighed by the church. Evidence given by persons who are of unquestioned veracity may be received by the church and considered by her as valid testimony.

7. If two members should fall into a dispute, and no testimony is available to show which one is right, they should be required to cease the dispute at once. There might be a misunderstanding.

8. Neither husband nor wife should put the other away and marry another, except for the cause of fornication. If a husband and wife are unable to remain together peaceably, and decide to quietly separate from each other, they may do so only for peace, but not to marry again. In such case, if either should marry again, he or she thereby becomes an adulterer and the other is thereby released. The discipline herein refers to members of the church; but we believe the moral law of God governing marriage and prohibiting adultery is binding upon the unregenerate as well as the regenerate. The church should not retain a person who is living in adultery.

9. We do not think our members should be retained in the church who hold membership in or affiliate with any of the so-called fraternal or religious institutions of the world. It is a well-known fact that it has always been against the rules of the Primitive Baptist churches of the South to retain members who affiliate with such institutions, whether secret or otherwise, which rule we believe to be Scriptural; and we think it would be destructive to endeavor to reform the churches. We should continue to stand where we have always stood on this question, and those things should not be permitted to make inroads in our churches. In this we are not endeavoring to regulate other folks or their affairs; but we desire that our churches all remain clear of these things, as they have in the past.

10. Each and every local church has the right to dispose of her local affairs as she deems proper; that is, she has the right to discipline her own members; but no church has the right to harbor and protect heretics, liars, fornicators, and the like, to the hurt and annoyance of sister churches. Neither does a church have the right to harbor or engage in things that are contrary to Baptist usage, or contrary to the Scriptures, to the hurt of her sister churches.

11. As to associations of churches, we deem it good for them to meet together to worship the Lord in an associational way - that is, to associate together in the worship and service of God; but it is not necessary for a church to be in an association in order to be an orderly church; but we recommend that the churches involved in these troubles take their original places in the

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associations, which will help restore the good feeling that should prevail. An association is not a higher court, for they are absolutely without ecclesiastical authority. Trouble should be attended to by the churches, and not by associations. Fellowship should not be withdrawn from any sister church until all possible labor has been bestowed upon said church for any alleged error or wrong. If troubles were always attended to by the churches, then they would not be taken to the associations for adjustment. If our brethren would always keep these things in mind, and observe them, some troubles would not spread as much as they do.

12. When a person is excluded by an orderly Old Baptist church, he is thereby excluded from every orderly Old Baptist church on earth. If a person is excluded by one church in our body, and another receives him into their body without satisfaction first being made at the church where he was excluded, it denies that a sister church has the right to discipline her own members. It is too often the case that when a little friction comes up brethren may be too quick to receive members this way. Where something is charged against a person, that is the only place on earth to get the charge cancelled.

13. Where there are reports in circulation of immoral conduct our brethren should be careful about repeating hearsays. For the benefit and good of the cause, when such reports are in circulation, such matters should be investigated by the church of the person's membership. If the party is innocent, it is for his good that the church exonerate the party. This is not only for the good of the brother, but for the benefit of the cause. It would not look well for the party against whom such reports are in circulation to object to a fair and impartial investigation. Until there is such investigation we should be careful not to circulate such hearsay reports about the brother. We may sometimes say things we should not say. In such cases as this it would look well for the party who may thus have such evil reports in circulation against him as are detrimental to his character and detrimental to the cause to ask his church to go into an official investigation of those matters. The church should thoroughly investigate such things, whether the party involved asks for it or not - she should do this for the protection of her member as well as for the vindication and good of the cause of the Master.

14. As to the use of organs or other musical instruments in our churches, we will say that they were first introduced into church service by Papal Rome. Our people have always objected to them. It is not necessary for us to here discuss the matter as to whether it is wrong to use them or not, or to assign reasons why it is wrong to use them. We will merely say here that "whatever is Baptist is scriptural." If this is not true, then our claim of being Scriptural is false, and we are not the church of Christ. Hence, to use such things in our churches is a departure; and where it has been done, confession of the wrong should be made, and such engaged in no more.

15. As to what are called protracted or continued meetings, we would lovingly utter a word of caution. We would not say that any church that holds a meeting of several days, or a week, has departed from the faith or fundamental principles of our people; but we would lovingly caution the brethren in regard to that matter. Our observation is that they may lead to a wrong impression sometimes. Let us be careful not to engage in such meetings and talk about them in such a way as to leave the impression that our people engage in modern revivalism. They may sometimes lead to the idea that the time to join the church and to serve the Lord is at and during the "big meeting." Let us be careful to try to be conservative at all times, and not do things that are not expedient. We would utter the same note of warning to brethren in regard to visiting sections or places other than our own regularly established churches, that great care be exercised to give every evidence that such labors are bestowed for the purpose of correction and not condonement. We deem it to be hurtful, not only to the cause in general, but to the brethren as well who might make such visits without such caution.

16. Where parties have been received by one church on confession of faith, when excluded by another church, in the settlement and adjustment of the differences that have brought about disturbance in this country, such matters as this should be adjusted to the satisfaction of both churches. Especially is this true where such parties were excluded for immoral conduct. Such as that will have to be adjusted before peace can be fully restored and all the churches be in full fellowship, or for fellowship between churches to continue.

17. Our people cannot afford to depart from the recognized practice of our people all along the ages in the matter of baptism. It has ever been the practice of the Primitive Baptists to reject baptism as administered by other people, and to receive no one from other people on the baptism administered by that people - any people. If we recognize baptism administered by another people, must we not also recognize their work of exclusions, in order to be consistent? We consider it to be disorder for our people to receive persons on their baptism administered by others, and such churches as do so should not expect to be recognized as orderly churches by the great body of Baptists. This does not militate against, nor is it against, the age-old practice of our people in recognizing each other's work in the settlement and adjustment of their troubles and coming together, where they have been divided.

18. As to Sunday schools, Bible classes, aid societies, or any other such societies as have been invented by the world and engaged in by them, we consider all such as a departure from the original ground and principles which the Primitive Baptists have held to all along the line. The way such things usually get into the church is by the assuming of some name that may lead our people to think there is no harm in it; but such innovations and departures always grow, and result in trouble and distress among our people. They should be let severely alone. If we want peace, the way to have it is to let all things alone that bring trouble. Our people spoke out in no uncertain terms on Progressive measures many years ago in the trouble with the Kirklands and others. This does not mean that the brethren, who are not ministers, are to take no part in the services in the church in a public way. Brethren should be willing to take part in the service, such as introducing the service for the preacher, by reading a Scriptural lesson, and commenting on the same if he feels to do so, and by offering prayer. And the regular service should be held and conference business attended to by the brethren if no preacher should be present. The preacher cannot perform the public service of God for the entire membership. We cannot serve God by proxy. It is, too, a lamentable fact that our brethren do not read the Scriptures in their homes as they should. Hence they depend too much on the preacher to know "if these things be true." But this in no sense justifies our people in conducting a so-called Bible class or so-called Bible study in our churches. Such things, when the seed is sown, always grow and develop into the greater and distressing things. We can only say, Diligently do what we here recommend, and let the other thing alone.

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19. We recommend that in times of dispute among brethren, whether about doctrine, order, or any question affecting the peace of the churches, that great caution and prudence be exercised by those affected. Especially should brethren desist from airing troubles or disturbances from the pulpit and in territories where such disturbances are not had. We recommend that all our brethren endeavor to keep trouble in the bounds of its origin, and labor earnestly for its settlement there.

20. We, your committee, realize and recognize the fact that in times of trouble and confusion among the brethren and churches, or in churches, those who are contending for right principles and for truth may get in the flesh and do and say things that are wrong and are liable to act hastily; and, therefore, it is almost, if not altogether, a universal fact that wrongs are done on both sides. Hence, we conclude by recommending that the churches and brethren who are desiring peace and wish for fellowship to abound in our beloved Zion, and who are willing and desire to continue in the good old way our fathers trod, all confess their faults, and straighten out and eliminate the irregularities, and adjust all wrongs and differences, and bury the past, and forgive each other all wrongs committed; and then live in such a way as to "let brotherly love continue." Let us remember, too, that it has always been, and is yet, contrary to Primitive Baptist practice, and contrary to Scripture, to mix and mingle and affiliate with the worldly religionists. Treat all men kindly, but let them have their own worship and ways, and let us go on in the way of our fathers. "Lay not field to field." "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Let us try to remember to do the things that are expedient, not forgetting that some things may be lawful but not expedient. The apostle tried to act according to expediency as well as lawfully. We will do well to try to pattern after him. Let us remember, too, that the Bible teaches us how we "ought to behave ourselves in the house of God." If we would all of us always "behave ourselves," we would not have troubles and divisions in our churches, and the peace and fellowship of our people would not be broken or destroyed. The best way, and the only way, for us to have and to enjoy the blessings of God, and for our churches to grow and prosper, under God's blessing, is to teach and do just what God says do, and nothing more, remembering that what is more than He has commanded is positively forbidden. Deut. 4:1,2; Rev. 22:18,19.

Respectfully submitted.

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Signed:

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