



# The Baptist Faith & Message

## Article 14: Cooperation

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

On July 20, 1969, as Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon, he said, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." But that one small step was by no means the achievement of a single man. It took tons of blueprints, 20,000 contractors, 5 million rocket and spacecraft parts, a monthly output of 20 million pages of print material, and a total expenditure of 22 billion dollars to enable Neil Armstrong to take that walk on the surface of the moon. The task of communicating the gospel in today's world is a complex and expensive business. It requires the combined resources of millions of Christians working, praying, and giving together

### **I. The LEVEL Of Cooperation**

*Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God*

*Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 2 Corinthians 8:1-3, 7*

In this passage Paul is commending the churches of Macedonia for their support of their brethren in Jerusalem. Notice there are multiple churches involved in the support from the Macedonian region. Paul is also challenging the church at Corinth to also cooperate with the Macedonian churches in the important work.

As we have discussed before, each Southern Baptist church is autonomous and self-governing under the Lordship of Christ. These churches, though, may decide to cooperate with other like-minded churches to provide for mutual encouragement and the advancement of God's kingdom through evangelism and missions.

Since the 1600s, Baptists have formed associations. An association is a group of churches that voluntarily join together for fellowship, encouragement and missions.

Just today I met with approximately 40 other pastors who are a part of the Hamilton Co. Baptist Association.

Churches may also choose to form a convention. In the United States, Southern Baptist churches have organized both state conventions and a national body, the Southern Baptist Convention.

## **II. The LIMITS Of Cooperation**

*Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches.*

*But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. 2 Corinthians 8:17-18*

Paul did not command them to give as an apostle, he was not exercising a hierarchal authority over them demanding a percentage of their undesignated receipts to go toward this mission effort. Instead, he mentioned Titus voluntary participation and encouraged their voluntary participation.

Within the SBC, churches comprise the membership of state conventions and the SBC. They join voluntarily and may withdraw voluntarily.

Conventions exercise no control over the churches. Each level is autonomous. Thus, an association cannot dictate to a church or to the state convention. Of course, the reverse is true as well. A church might be a member of one body but not another, though that is unusual. Associations and conventions are governed by votes cast by messengers sent from member churches.

## **III. The LEADING Of Cooperation**

*They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.*

Since there is no hierarchal authority from an association or convention to the local church, however they can serve as advisory bodies to local churches. One of the ways they do that is through lay-leadership training. VBS, SS, etc.

*There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the saints. For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. 2 Corinthians 9:1-2*

Paul detailed how the Corinthian's participation was motivating to other churches to be involved.

#### **IV. The LABOR Of Cooperation**

*Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.*

Three aspects mentioned in this part of the article: Missionary, educational, and benevolent. We've talked about our missionary work as SB already, and educational as well. Benevolence as far as disaster relief.

*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 2 Corinthians 9:12-13*

During the New Testament era, the gospel was carried to every corner of the Graeco-Roman world by missionaries like Paul, Barnabas, and Silas. But beneath the surface was an ever-growing network of faithful Christians, like the community of believers at Philippi, who undergirded the work of these messengers of the gospel with prayer and financial support. Together they formed what Paul called a "participation in the gospel" (Phil. 1:1-6 ).

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. Phil 1:3-5*

#### **V. The LATITUDE Of Cooperation**

*Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations*

There are some churches that are not Baptist that I would wholeheartedly recommend people join. By the same token, there are some churches that are Baptist that I would not recommend my worst enemy to join. We can't just go by denominational name alone.

#### **VI. The LORD Of Cooperation**

*When the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.*

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Define levels of cooperation.