

# BAPTIST FEATURES

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**Yes, We Have Problems**  
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A father was complaining that his son was costing him too much money. Another father said, "I wish that my son was costing me money. He doesn't cost me one cent. You see, I buried him last week." The former father's son cost him money because he was alive and not dead.

Some of us may despair because Southern Baptists have problems. Should it not rather be a basis for hope? A dead denomination has no problems. Ours are a sign of vigor and life. Hily Jasper once said, "It is not what happens to you, but how you take it that counts." This is particularly true of Southern Baptists at this time. Our problems will not overwhelm us unless we permit them to do so. From lack of ability and space I do not propose to deal exhaustively with them. But I would suggest six things to consider as we deal with them.

First, let us recognize that we have problems. Nothing is to be gained by ignoring them. They are not like the little man who is not there, and if I look the other way maybe he will go away. Our problems are real. They are vital. They cannot be ignored. To do so will result only in increasing them in scope and depth. They must be faced.

Second, let us determine the nature of our problems. They are varied: social, financial, organizational, theological. In a very real sense the first three are related to the last. Let us therefore, focus upon it for the moment.

There are a number of contributing factors to the theological problem. The fact that we have no official creed is one. Our insistence upon every Christian's right to interpret the scriptures as he feels led of the Holy Spirit is another. Lack of a proper balance between "academic freedom" and "academic responsibility" in some instances forms still another. Terminology and the lack of proper communication and comprehension must be included. Conflicting views regarding "inspiration" cannot be ignored. Divergent positions as to our relationship to other Christian bodies and other theological traditions enter into the picture. The list could be continued, but these will suffice for the moment.

Third, let us determine that we shall not become a problem within the problem. Wherever lies the solution we can best find it together. There is a wrong way to do a right thing. The good must never become the enemy of the best. Christian things must not be done in an un-Christian way. As we "earnestly contend" for our interpretation of one passage of scripture we should beware lest we shall violate the clear teachings of others pertaining to Christian love, brotherhood, and the fellowship of believers. Christians may honestly differ in conviction yet remain one in spirit.

Fourth, let us recognize that in the solution of this problem time is a factor. It did not arise in a day. It will not be solved in a day. God uses time in all things --- to grow a tree, heal a body, develop a mind. A barren land is not populated with trees overnight simply by a vote of its populace. Sick people are not made well by the unanimous vote of the medical staff. Minds are not trained by the vote of a college board of trustees. While these are imperfect illustrations, they do suggest that in matters relating to personality and spirit, time is required to achieve the desired result. Of course a vote expresses a determination to proceed in a given enterprise. But having done so it becomes a process involving time and the natural laws of God. Southern Baptists have never sought to circumvent a problem. They will not do so now. But we cannot solve problems of theology in an interrelated fellowship such as ours by voting "aye" or "no." It will be done through patience, prayer, love, understanding, and determination.

Fifth, let us determine to find the right solution. In most problems there are three sides -- yours, mine, and the right one. Since we are all imperfect human beings and sinners saved by grace, any solution which we reach to a given problem may, and probably will, fall short of "the right one." This is not to deny the power

of the Holy Spirit. It is to recognize the imperfections resident in us, his instruments. But as far as our human weaknesses will allow we must endeavor to let the Holy Spirit work through us.

In the meantime we must remember that "unity in diversity" has ever been a strength among Southern Baptists. A review of our history will reveal that as a people we have never dotted the same "i's" and crossed the same "T's"! In the basic body of belief we have maintained our unity. In matters of difference we have allowed diversity. This does not mean that we should compromise God's word or forsake our convictions and principles. It should encourage us to contend without being contentious, allowing for honest differences and resolving them in patience, love, faith, and understanding, as we seek to interpret God's word with the New Testament as our final criterion on truth.

In former generations Southern Baptist leaders have honestly differed but have found Christian unity in the greater fellowship of their common love for Christ and his word. Thus they have marched together under God to make us the people we are today in God's eternal purpose. We can afford to do no less in our generation.

Sixth, there is no question that we all seek this right solution. How shall we do so? As a beginning, may I suggest that you read with me prayerfully the words of the Apostle Paul who ever contended for a pure faith.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:11-16).

We have not arrived. But let us be on our way!