

To All Baptists Who Believe the Bible to be God's Word

By: W. B. Riley, D.D.

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At a great missionary conference of the Baptist Bible Union of North America, held in Chicago, November 1-4, 1925, it was decided to form a new missions department and to adopt as its initial enterprise the Russian Missionary Society, of which Pastor Fetler is the general director.

The executive committee was also authorized to investigate other fields—in China, India, Africa, and elsewhere, with a view to the prosecution of foreign mission work in these and other countries.

This action of the Baptist Bible Union grows out of the action of the Northern Baptist Convention in Seattle, in rejecting a resolution intended to recall modernist missionaries from the foreign field; and in the reaction of orthodox Baptists against the Rockefeller-Fosdick effort to dominate the denomination, and to shape its missionary policy.

The Convention was largely attended by representatives from many States, covering the territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada. The special subject considered in all addresses was the administration of the Holy Spirit in the activities of the church. Much time was given to prayer; and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit were most manifest.

Since the publication of the Bible Union's intention to form a foreign mission society, there has been a great response from all parts of the continent and from the foreign field, indicating that the action of the Bible Union, in this case, will create an entirely new situation in the Baptist denomination in America.

The following statement embodying the recommendations of the council of the Union to the Convention, was adopted with unanimity and great enthusiasm. We commend it to the careful and prayerful consideration of all true Baptists in America:

“At the meeting of Northern Baptist Convention held in Seattle, Washington, June 24-29, a commission, which had been appointed the year before, to investigate the affairs of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, presented its report in a lengthy document which referred, among other things, to the announcement of the ‘inclusive policy’ of the board; and declared that while the majority of the missionaries were true to the faith, others were not so.”

Examples of departure from the faith were described in the following statement:

That, however, certain missionaries have laid themselves liable to just criticism and necessary investigation by the board seems to us to be clear from quotations which we now make. These are extracts from statements of certain of the missionaries about whose beliefs formal complaint has been made:

Dealing with the subject of the person of Christ one writes:

But the unique element of Jesus’ nature does not lie in his being the “only begotten” Son of God. He is not that by his own teaching. Rather, he is the only perfect one among the countless millions of sons of God who have been born into our heavenly Father’s earthly home.

Jesus owes many a debt to men who had not obtained the perfection that he had in his relation to God.

In dealing with the person of Christ as related to his death he writes: “In setting an unbridgeable gulf between the glory of Jesus and our own Possibilities, it seems to me that men are opposing themselves diametrically to his teaching and desires, and are to a large degree rendering his sacrificial life and death vain.”

On the inspiration of the Scriptures and in arguing to show that they are not infallible he writes:

“Surely it is clear that the Bible, part for part, is not an infallible book. . . . There is many a book, many a sermon, many a poem of our day as God-inspired and as God-filled and helpful as many of the Books of the Bible and more so than some. God is still speaking to his children through the voice of the prophets.”

Of sin he writes:

“To-day we have come to look upon wrongdoers not so much as sinners as unfortunates.”

Of atonement he writes:

“When we see ourselves in our true position as the growing, erring children of God, is it not clear that such a thing as an atonement, a making good for us by another, could not possibly be acceptable to our Father, or even considered by him? Seeing that we are a family together, not only is it not derogatory of God and Jesus to abandon the idea of the atonement, but it is testifying to the perfect quality of God’s fatherliness.

“It is not primarily the death of Jesus that saves us. It would not have been necessary under all circumstances.”

Of final salvation he writes:

“But what about those children who desert the heavenly home? Who, when they know their Father’s desire is otherwise, deliberately turn away and follow the demands of their lower natures? Is there any hope for them? (In a later paragraph his answer is found):

“Jesus will keep on and never give up until every last one is found. There is no man, no matter how vile, without some solid good, some of the stuff of God in him. There is some invitation of God to which he will respond, although he may have to hear it in the next world. God will never turn his back upon his children, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

Another writes:

“I wish I might say that I have a firm faith in eternal life. It would be a comforting belief. I have resolved to live as though life were eternal—but I have failed to find convincing evidence that such is the case, or that such is not the case. I must regard Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:19 as contrary to Jesus’ own ideals. ‘If we have only hope in Christ in this life we are of all men most pitiable.’ Also verse 32 of the same, ‘If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.’ That is not my philosophy. Whether we are to be raised or whether death ends all, it is still worth while to live the Christ life—to love God and men, to suffer for others, to serve and sacrifice. If death be the end, then we have lived as sons of God; if death be, as I hope, the entrance to a new life, it is well.”

We have noted in a number of instances also a hesitant and negative attitude on vital truths, for example, a missionary when asked this question “Was Jesus Christ a man, unique man, but man only, or was he something more than a man?” writes:

“I was not prepared to answer with a categorical ‘yes’ or ‘no’, for it is one of those questions that cannot be answered in that way.”

This same missionary when later questioned before the board is quoted as saying in response to the question as to whether or not he believed in the virgin birth: “I think not.” His reply when asked if he believed in miracles, “I think not.” When asked if he believed in the bodily resurrection, His final answer was “I think not”, and when asked if he believed in the inspiration of the Scriptures he said, “I think not.”

The report of this commission was adopted unanimously, after which the following resolution was moved by Dr. W. B. Hinson, of Portland, and seconded by Dr. W. B. Riley, of Minneapolis:

Whereas, The report of our committee appointed a year ago to investigate the work on our foreign fields reveals both a careful and extensive survey of the same; and

Whereas, According to its report there are at present upon some of the stations men and women who do not hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith as historically interpreted by Baptists; and

Whereas, The Northern Baptist Convention in its session in Indianapolis adopted the New Testament as our basis of faith; and

Whereas, The New Testament clearly teaches the divine and direct creation of man in the image of God, the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, the certain deity of Jesus Christ, involving, his virgin birth, his sinless life, his sacrificial death, his bodily resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God and his return;

Whereas, The same Scriptures clearly declare the necessity of the sinful soul's regeneration in order to redemption; the baptism of believers a condition of church membership; and involves for all the saved a commission to preach the gospel, Baptize into the name of the Lord Jesus, and teach them the observance of all things which he has commanded; therefore

Be it resolved, That this Convention record its keen appreciation of the work of this commission; its exceeding great pleasure that the commission can report a majority of our missionaries loyal to the faith once for all delivered; and its profound conviction that in the interest of peace in our own body and the progress of our cause on foreign fields, and the honor of our Christ who is very God of very God, our foreign mission boards are hereby instructed to immediately recall every representative, whether in evangelistic or educational work, who denies any of the great fundamentals of our faith aforementioned, including especially those appointees found by the commission's investigation to be out of harmony with this faith; and as speedily as possible to fill the places thus vacated by equally competent men and women whose evangelical faith and fervor cannot be questioned; and

Be it further resolved, That it is the conviction of this Convention that no man or woman should accept place on our mission boards who cannot, with whole heart, adopt and advocate the historic Baptist and evangelical faith.

After much discussion, an amendment was submitted, striking out everything after the third paragraph, and substituting the following:

Be it resolved, That we urge our Foreign Mission Board, in the light of the facts reported by the commission, such action as seems to them will best conserve our denominational interests and best serve the kingdom of Christ.

The amendment carried by a vote of 742 to 574.

After the afternoon session of the Convention, a special meeting of the Baptist Bible Union was called for 9:30, and a large building was crowded to the doors. The following resolution was adopted by unanimous vote:

Whereas, The Northern Baptist Convention rejected the following simple statement of the fundamentals of the faith commonly held by Baptists:

“The New Testament clearly teaches the divine and direct creation of man in the image of God, the supernatural inspiration of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, the certain deity of Jesus Christ, involving, his virgin birth, his sinless life, his sacrificial death, his bodily resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God and his return.

“The same Scriptures clearly declare the necessity of the sinful soul’s regeneration in order to redemption; the baptism of believers a condition of church membership; and involves for all the saved a commission to preach the gospel, baptize into the name of the Lord Jesus, and teach them the observance of all things which he has commanded”; and

Whereas, This statement of the fundamentals of the faith was rejected, in spite of the fact that the commission appointed to enquire into the affairs of the Foreign Mission Board of the Northern Baptist Convention, reported that there are at present upon some of the stations men and women who do not hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith as historically interpreted by Baptists; and

Whereas, This rejection of the fundamentals of the faith is certain to have the effect of more completely destroying the confidence of Baptists in the Foreign Mission Board, and the general administration of the Northern Baptist Convention; therefore

Be it resolved, That this meeting of the members of the Baptist Bible Union and of fundamentalists in sympathy with the Baptist Bible Union standards of faith, request the executive committee of the Baptist Bible Union, together with such fundamentalists as the executive committee may consider it wise to call into counsel, to take into consideration the advisability of organizing a foreign mission society, founded upon the confession of faith of the Baptist Bible Union; and in the event of the decision being reached by that committee that the exigencies of the present foreign mission situation in the Northern Baptist Convention point to a providential leading towards the founding of such a society, this meeting further requests the executive committee of the Union to call a meeting at a place as central as possible to the territory of the Northern Baptist Convention for the organization of such a society; and

Further, That the said organization meeting shall be announced at least two months in advance of the date of assembly, and in such a way as to reach, if possible, the entire constituency of the Northern Baptist Convention; and

Be it further resolved, That this meeting urge all churches, and associations of churches, or state or other conventions, still holding to the fundamentals of the faith hereinbefore enumerated; and which were rejected by the Northern Baptist Convention, to express at the earliest convenient occasion their non-concurrence with the Convention’s action; and also to consider and express whether they are ready to assist in uniting all fundamentalist Baptists within the territory of the Northern Baptist

Convention; and, where expedient, beyond its bounds, in foreign missionary enterprise which in respect to the membership of its boards, its missionaries, and teachers, will abide by the great fundamentals of the faith hereinbefore stated.

Another great Baptist Bible Union meeting was held on Friday, and the following statement was authorized to be issues:

Through the medium of this assembly of members of the Baptist Bible Union, and other fundamentalists in sympathy with the Union's standards of faith, the Baptist Bible Union emphatically declares that it is determined to do its work as an organization within the existing Baptist conventions of the continent; and if such reforms as it proposes are not effected the first time they are submitted, they will be submitted again and again at succeeding Conventions.

The Union was organized to preserve the Baptist denomination, and not to destroy it. The Baptist Bible Union proposes the only possible basis of union and of co-operative action for true Baptists, namely, an acceptance of the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. For when Baptists abandon belief in the Bible as God's Word, they have surrendered the last logical reason their separate existence.

The Baptist Bible Union recognizes in the Rockefeller influence in the Baptist denomination, a power which will allow neither Baptist faith nor Baptist practice to stand in the way of the accomplishment of the obvious purpose to reduce the whole denomination to a well-oiled political machine, in which professors and denominational secretaries and all other beneficiaries of its funds shall be subject to its direction.

The proposal to organize a foreign mission society must not be interpreted as a first step towards separation from the Baptist denomination; but rather as a movement which will provide Baptists with an opportunity to invest their time, their prayers, and their money, in a mission enterprise which shall be based upon the whole Bible. But the Baptist Bible Union will use its influence to the utmost to persuade all its members to continue in the denomination, and unceasingly to fight for its purification. Like the crew of the ship of Tarshish on a stormy sea, the Baptist Bible Union, with other Baptist fundamentalist, have rowed hard to bring the denominational ship to land. They will now for some time ship their oars, to devote all their energies to the task of throwing the Jonah of mammonized modernism overboard.

And the Baptist Bible Union hereby resolves and announces, its determination to take the offensive against modernism, particularly as expressed in the Rockefeller-Fosdick combination, with greater vigor than ever.

In obedience to these instructions, the executive committee of the Baptist Bible Union met in Toronto, September 1-4, 1925; and after hours of prayer and counsel, unanimously decided to report favorably concerning the organization of a missions department. The action was taken with great deliberation, and even in grief, as it was

perfectly understood by the committee that such an organization would create an entirely new situation in Baptist affairs. It was also unanimously agreed, however, that no other righteous way out of our difficulties existed.

This fact is further emphasized by the consideration that very shortly after the Convention adjourned, it was officially announced by that board that it would continue on the “inclusive policy”—by which was meant, that all different faiths found within the Baptist Convention fellowship should have their representatives on foreign fields, and on equal ground. When it was remembered that practically every official of the Foreign Board voted in favor of seating the delegates from the Park avenue or Rockefeller church, it was perfectly understood that no conceivable reform, such as calling home from the foreign fields those who wore the name of Baptist, but in fact were Unitarian, could be hoped for; since the men who would approve the denial of the full inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ, his bodily resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God, and who would also be willing to throw into discard baptism of believers by immersion in water, in connection with the home church, could never be trusted to emphasize these things as essential on the foreign field. The only conceivable cure for such an un-Biblical and utterly subversive spirit within the denomination, is the creation of a new agency that shall stand for the faith which produced the Baptist denomination, and which will furnish our churches with a channel through which to exercise their divinely-given right to preach at home and abroad the gospel revealed in the Bible.

The decision of the executive committee of last September was widely published through certain papers; and the entire membership of the Baptist Bible Union was

circularized, calling this conference for the consideration of the foreign mission problem.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing facts, the council now recommends the following:

1. That we establish a department of missions in connection with the Baptist Bible Union of North America, to be conducted through our headquarters in Chicago.

2. That the executive committee of the Baptist Bible Union be given the general oversight of this department, and empowered to conduct the same in strict accord with the Bible Union confession of faith, and in keeping with their best judgment; reporting in full to the annual meeting of the Baptist Bible Union, and as much oftener an occasion shall require.

It is hereby stated that the approval by this conference of the recommendations hereinbefore expressed, will authorize the executive committee to secure such premises, such agents or secretaries, as may be essential to the effective conduct of such department.

3. And further, it is the judgment of this conference that the field of our foreign work should be unlimited, different stations being taken up as occasion may arise, and the judgment of the committee may approve. The executive committee, therefore, is hereby authorized to investigate any Baptist foreign mission enterprise which shall seek this Union's sponsorship or support; and that the executive committee shall, in the name of the Baptist Bible Union, give such enterprise its endorsement, only if, and when, the missionaries engaged and the members of its administrative body shall have subscribed to the Baptist Bible Union's confession of faith.

4. It is also here laid down as a guiding principle for the conduct of the missions department of the Union, that, for all money received, a receipt shall be given; that money specifically designated as for any country or missionary organization or individual, shall be expended in obedience to the donor's direction; and that all money received for any purpose shall be accounted for on request.

5. Further, that as the Baptist Bible Union has been begun as a venture of faith, it is hereby determined that its mission work shall be prosecuted by the same principle; and that, therefore, no debt shall be incurred, and that only such money as God by his Spirit moves his people to give shall be expended.

6. This missionary conference of the Baptist Bible Union also declares that the Union's objective in foreign missions shall be evangelization first and foremost. If education be undertaken at all, it should be regarded as secondary, and its obligation assumed only insofar as it will aid the program of evangelism; since our object is Christianization and not civilization--bringing men to the cross, instead of vainly endeavoring to effect their salvation through human culture, believing as we do that the evangelized will seek culture and secure the same for themselves in exact proportion as they come to truly know Christ. We esteem the salvation of the soul to be an indispensable pre-requisite to the proper care and control of the body, the cultivation of the mind, and the elevation of the race: in other words, we believe the true mission of the church is found in the great commission: first, to make disciples by preaching the gospel of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and second, to teach and instruct as he has commanded, and thereby to build up the church: we do not believe in the reversal of this order.

7. The executive committee is hereby instructed to take such steps as are necessary to effect the incorporation of the Baptist Bible Union of North America, having headquarters in Chicago.

8. Furthermore, we desire here and now to declare to the world, that in entering into this co-operative endeavor to preach the gospel at home and abroad, we affirm our conviction that: "The local church has the absolute right of self-government, free from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations; and that the one and only superintendent is Christ, through the Holy Spirit; that it is scriptural for true churches to co-operate with each other in contending for the faith and for the furtherance of the gospel; that every church is the sole and only judge of the measure and method of its co-operation; on all matters of membership, of polity, of government, of discipline, of benevolence, the will of the local church is final."—(Baptist Bible Union confession of Faith—Article xiii).

9. It is hereby understood and declared that this mission department is not intended to reflect upon any missionary organization that stands for "the faith once for all delivered to the saints", as revealed in the Bible, and as historically held by Baptists.

10. And further, after a first-hand investigation of the work being conducted among Russians, Slavs and Lets, by Pastor Fetler, and having thereby satisfied ourselves that the work of the Russian Missionary Society is of God, and is being conducted in accord with the principles of the Word of God, we heartily and without reservation adopt the work of the said Society as the initial foreign mission enterprise of the missions department of the Baptist Bible Union of North America; with the understanding, however, that the work of the Russian Missionary Society shall be conducted in harmony with the conditions hereinbefore laid down.

We also state for the information of the membership of the Baptist Bible Union, and of Bible-believing Baptists throughout the continent, that it has been agreed by the authorities of the said Society, that all missionaries and officials and members of committees or boards, who have any official relation to the Society, shall be required to subscribe to the Baptist Bible Union confession of faith. American headquarters of the Russian Missionary Society, 1844 West Monroe Street, Chicago, Illinois; Rev. E. E. Shields, home director and treasurer.

Already we have received appeals from many fields, and the foregoing clauses of this statement are designed to empower the executive committee to investigate all such fields and to endorse and recommend to our constituency such missionary organizations, as desire our sponsorship and support, as are found to be in harmony with our historic Baptist position, and, therefore, with the doctrines set out in the confession of faith of the Baptist Bible Union. It is earnestly hoped that before the expiration of twelve months, we may be in a position, without reservation, to recommend to our constituency, sound foreign mission enterprises in China, India, Africa, and other foreign lands.

Respecting mission work at home: this conference issues an earnest call to every pastor to do the work of an evangelist, and endeavor to build up strong evangelistic and Bible-teaching centers in the churches to which the Holy Spirit has appointed them.

It is also the sense of this conference that, at the present time, the Union is not in a position to employ evangelists, or to assume any responsibility in respect to credentialing evangelists, believing that a divinely-commissioned evangelist will be led

into divinely-appointed spheres of service by the Spirit of God; and that a Spirit-filled ministry requires no other credential.