

"Old Landmarkism"

by J. R. Graves

Chapter 9

The Inconsistencies and Evils of Intercommunion among Baptists.

"Truth is never contradictory nor inconsistent with itself." -- Tombes.

Baptist churches, with all their rights, have no right to be inconsistent, nor to favor a practice unwarranted by the Word of God, and productive of evils. Under the inflexible law of "usage," which compels the pastor to invite "all members of sister churches present" to the Lord's Supper, the following inconsistencies and evils, exceedingly prejudicial to our denominational influence and growth, are practiced and fostered.

1. Baptist Churches that practice intercommunion have practically no communion of their own. They have church members, church conferences, church discipline, but no church communion; and, therefore, no scripturally observed Lord's Supper, and, therefore, none at all, as I have shown in Chapter VII. The communion of such churches is denominational, and not church communion.

2. Baptist Churches that practice intercommunion have no guardianship over the Lord's Supper, which is divinely enjoined upon them to exercise. They have control of their own members to exclude them from the table if unworthy, but none whatever of others more unworthy who may come. Such churches can exclude heretics, drunkards, revelers, and "every one that walketh disorderly" from their membership, that they may not defile the feast; but they cannot protect the table from such so long as they do not limit it to their membership.

3. There are Baptist Churches that exclude from their own membership all drunkards, theater-goers, dancers, horse-racers, and visitors of the race-course, because they cannot fellowship such practices as Godly walking or becoming a Christian, and therefore believe that they are commanded to purge the feast of all such characters as leaven, and, yet, by the invitation to the members of all other Baptist Churches, they receive the very same characters to their table every time they spread it.

ILLUSTRATION 1. --- The church at C---- excluded a member for "general hard drinking and occasional drunkenness," because she could not eat with such. He united with the church at W----the next month, for he was wealthy and family influential; and on the next communion at C---- he accepted the urgent invitation of courtesy, and sat down by the side of the brother who preferred the charge of drunkenness against him.

ILLUSTRATION 2. The church at M---- excluded two members on the charge of adultery, for marrying contrary to the law of Christ; the one having a living wife, and the other a living husband; they had both been legally divorced, not for the one cause specified, but it was generally believed that they deserted their respective companions that they might obtain an excuse for marrying. Three months after they both united with a church ten miles distant, and now never fail to accept the affectionate invitations of the former church to commune with it.

4. There are multitudes -- I rejoice to say nearly all our Southern churches outside the cities -- who will not receive persons immersed by Catholics or Campbellites, Protestants or Mormons, because they do not regard them as baptized at all; yet by their open denominational invitations they receive all such -- and there are many of them in the churches -- to their table, as duly qualified.

ILLUSTRATION 1.--- The church at S---- refused to receive two Campbellites on their baptism. They offered themselves to the Sixth Street church, which received alien immersions, and whose pastor was an immersed Campbellite; were received, and they made it a point to accept the very pressing invitation of the church at L---- to commune with it.

ILLUSTRATION 2.---The church at H---- has several members received on their Mormon immersions. Her sister church at P---- repudiates such immersions as null and void, yet these very members never fail to accept her liberal denominational invitations. From principal and solemn duty she forbids all such as her members, but from courtesy invites all such, as foreigners, to commune with her.

CONSISTENCY. -- If each Baptist Church had its own communion, with its own members, independent of all others, then each church could receive into membership, or exclude from membership, whoever it pleased, and no other church or communion be injured by it. On the one hand, the church excluding a person would have no power to prevent his uniting with another church made up of members no better than himself; and, on the other hand, the church receiving the excluded person would not, in so doing, restore him to the communion from which he had been cast out.

THE EVILS OF DENOMINATIONAL COMMUNION

1. It opens the door to the table to all the ministerial impostors that pervade the land. They have repeatedly started from Maine or Canada, and "gone through" all our churches to the Southern Gulf and the Pacific Coast, and they can usually be traced back to the place whence they came by a grass-widow left in "perplexity" every one hundred fifty, or two hundred miles on the "back tract." These impostors hold "revival meetings" until all their borrowed sermons are exhausted, and make it a point to do all the

baptizing, and have the weakness of some other ministers to keep a record of the number of their baptisms. It is needless to say that the church is often divided by their influence, and left in confusion and disgrace when they are exposed. California can witness to the evils resulting from these characters.

The remedy is, let no strange traveling preacher be admitted to the table as a participant, nor into our pulpits, until the church has written back and learned that he is in all respects worthy.

2. Denominational communion never has been sustained, and never can be, but at the expense of peace. It has always been the occasion of discord among brethren. It has alienated churches one from the other. It has distracted and divided associations, and all for the very good reason that it is departure from the simplicity that is in Christ.

3. It has encouraged tens of thousands of Baptists, on moving away from the churches to which they belong, to go without transferring their membership to a church where they are going, as they could have the church privileges -- preaching and COMMUNION -- without uniting with, and bearing the churches burdens. Nor has it stopped here. It has done more in this way to multiply backsliders and apostates all over the country than any other one thing that can be named. If Baptists could have no such privileges without membership, they would keep their membership with them and enjoy it.

4. To this evil may be traced four out of five, if not nine out of ten, of all the councils called to settle difficulties between churches during the last twenty-five years. The difficulties have in one form or another, grown out of this practice, and would not have been, had our churches observed only church communion.

5. All the scandal heaped upon us as "close communion Baptists" with much of the prejudice produced in the public mind and fostered against us, has come from our denominational communion. Had our churches severely limited their communion as they have their discipline, to their own members, we should no more have heard of "close communion Baptists" then we now do of "close-membership Baptists," or "close-discipline Baptists's."

6. We annually lose thousands and tens of thousands of worthy persons who would have united with us, but for what they understand as our unwarranted close-communion. Our practice can never be satisfactorily explained to them as consistent, so long as we practice a partial, and not a general, open communion. Our denominational growth is very materially retarded by our present inconsistent practice of intercommunion. If we practiced strict church communion, these, and all Christians, could understand the matter at once; and no one would presume to blame us for not inviting members of other denominations to our table, when we refuse, from principal, to invite members of other Baptist churches -- our own brethren.

7. It is freely admitted by reliable brethren who enjoy the widest outlook over the denomination in America, that for the last few decades of years the general drift has been, and now is, setting towards "open communion" -- it is boasted of as a "broadening liberalism." There are numbers in all our churches -- and the number is increasing, especially in our fashionable city and wealthy town churches -- who are impatient of the present restrictions imposed upon the table; because, not being able to divide a principal, they are not able to see the consistency of inviting members of sister churches, and rejecting those whom we admit to be evangelical churches, as though all evangelical churches are not sister; nor can they divine why Pedobaptists ministers are authorized to preach the gospel and to immerse; are invited to occupy our pulpits, and even to serve our churches as supply pastors for a season -- all their ministrations recognized as valid, and yet there are debarred from our table. They work for us, and we refuse to allow them to eat. The only ground upon which we can successfully meet and counteract the liberalizing influences, which are gently bearing the Baptists of America into the slough of open communion, is strict local church communion, and the firm and energetic setting forth of the "Old Baptist Landmarks" advocated in this little book.

We have had assurances of the correctness of the statement from many of the standard men in our denomination.

In the last conversation had with the late Brother Poindexter, of Virginia, he freely expressed himself in substantially these words:

"You are aware that I have not fully endorsed all your positions known as Old Landmarkism, but I wish you to know my present convictions for your encouragement. I have carefully examined all the arguments, pro and con, and watched the tendency of things the last 20 years, and I am prepared to say that I am convinced that what you call "Old Landmarkism" constitutes the only bulwark to break the increasing tide of modern "liberalism," --- which is nothing but open communion --- that threatens to obliterate every vestige of Bible ecclesiasticism from the earth. Though my sympathies, and feelings, and practice, often, have been upon the liberal side, yet I am convinced that Baptists, if they long maintain their denominational existence, must stand squarely with you upon these principles."

Brother J. P. Boyce, the distinguished president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY., publicly declared on the floor of the Mississippi Baptist state convention, at Jackson, Miss., 1876, what he had before stated select to us privately --- that he was a Landmark Baptist.

He has openly proclaimed to the world his repudiation of "alien immersions" by immersing, in 1879, Brother Weaver, pastor of a Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. Brother Weaver, twenty years before, had been received into a Baptist Church on the Methodist immersion.

