

# THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST REVIEW

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Jack Keep, Editor

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## The Establishment of the Equality of Christ's Disciples

A Sermon by the Rev. John Quincy Adams (1825-1881)  
*Founder of the Baptist Church in Caldwell, New Jersey*

"One is your master, even Christ, and ye are brethren." Matt. 23:8

One of the most inveterate sins of fallen humanity is pride. Man thirsts for power. He loves to be elevated above his fellows, and to occupy a position of acknowledged superiority. He delights to be clothed with a little brief authority, which will enable him to look on all around him as his inferiors. It is the working of this spirit of arrogance and assumption that has created so many grades among men, both in the world and in the church. The disciples of Christ were infected with this spirit. They had imbibed it from the Jewish elders--the Scribes and Pharisees. They thirsted for the possession of such a degree of power and authority, as would entitle them to dictate to and rule over their brethren. Hence, we find them frequently disputing who should be the greatest. Christ invariably rebuked this spirit on every occasion of its manifestation. He taught them humility. He showed them that the principles of his gospel were opposed to all sentiments of pride, and that instead of favoring the arrogant wishes of depraved humanity, it was designed to convert mankind into a universal brotherhood, all possessing equal rights, acknowledging but one Head, one Superior, one Master, even himself. He taught that his church was to be an association of brethren, all its members subject to one law, and all amenable to one tribunal, the voice of the church.

But how sadly has the teaching of Christ on this subject been perverted; and the professedly Christian Church, instead of presenting to us the beautiful picture of a band of brethren, meeting together on the broad platform of equality, exhibits an array of gradations in authority, which vies with the most despotic governments of the world. Priestly arrogance and ministerial assumption of authority are exhibited on almost every hand, in both the Protestant and Papal churches; and from the class-leader to the mitred bishop--from the ruling elder to the triple-crowned Pope--there is a violation of Christ's declaration: "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Reform here is needed; and I announce, therefore as the *Fourth Feature* of the reform at which Baptists aim,

I. It will devolve on me to show, in the first place, that such equality does not generally exist.

In Romish and Protestant churches there is no recognition of equality among professed disciples of Christ. I suppose I need not stop to prove this assertion in reference to Romanism. All acknowledge that there are grades of power in that church. Even her most devoted adherents will not deny it.

Let us, then, turn to the Protestant churches. And first we will notice the *Episcopal*. Does this church recognize equality among her members? We reply, No! She has distinct and separate grades; and not only is the ministry above the laity, but there are three grades in the ministry: deacons, priests and bishops. In England, the bishops of this church, by virtue of their office, are clothed with temporal power. They are peers of the realm--that is nobles of the land. The archbishop of Canterbury has the appointment of all the bishops, and is the highest nobleman of England. The archbishops hold authority over all the bishops. The bishops hold authority over all the churches, and inferior clergy, in their respective dioceses. They appoint ministers to their charges; they suspend, degrade, and excommunicate them. In America there are no archbishops. But the bishops, though possessing no civil power, have the same ecclesiastical power as those in England. The church has no voice in her government. In the Triennial Convention, the bishops form a separate house distinct and superior to the clergy and laity.

But let us look again at the *Presbyterian church*. Does equality reign here? Do all her members stand on the broad even platform of the Gospel? Can they say, "One is our Master, even Christ?" Let them answer for themselves. Both in their Confession of Faith and Form of Government, we find that the government rests not in the hands of the church, but in the session, presbytery, synod and General Assembly. These bodies attend to all the business of the church. An individual church has no power to act in the reception of members, the exclusion of members, the calling or dismissing of a pastor, or any other act of government which Christ has committed to his church. Other masters are recognized besides him.

The whole tendency of Presbyterian church government is to exalt the ministry in their authority above the church. Indeed, the ministry belong to a different order. They do not belong to the church as the other members do; they belong to the Presbytery. The church can not discipline a minister; neither can the session try him; but the presbytery must do it. "When, therefore, a church is without a pastor, the moderator of the session shall be either the minister appointed by the presbytery for that purpose, or one invited by the session."

The church cannot act in receiving her own members. The session attends to this for her. A majority of the members of the church might be opposed to the reception of an individual, but if the session receive him, he is admitted. On the other hand, a person may fall under the censure of the session, and though all the church beside may esteem him a Christian, the session has power to exclude and excommunicate him. Is this equality?

But further, the Presbytery has power over the session and the church. By this body the rights of the church to call and dismiss a pastor are taken away. When a Presbyterian church calls a pastor, the call is not made to him, but to the Presbytery.

So, also, the minister himself is subject, not to the church, but to the Presbytery. He can not move without the permission of this body.

Next to the Presbytery is the Synod, and then the General Assembly. The Session must submit its doings to the Presbytery, the Presbytery to the Synod, and the Synod to the General Assembly. Is this equality?

The *Dutch Reformed church* is governed in a manner similar to the Presbyterian.

Let us turn our attention for a moment to the *Methodist Episcopal church*. Shall we find equality here? No; for its very name shows that its government is prelatical. I need not enlarge on this point; for no one, surely, will pretend that there is equality in this church. It's founder expressly disavows any idea of it. He says in a letter to John Mason, dated Jan. 13, 1790, "As long as I live the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists. We are no republicans, and never intend to be. It would be better for those who are so minded to go quietly away." There are more grades in the Methodist Episcopal church than in any other Protestant community; and any one who will read the "Discipline" will be convinced of it. A private member in the church has no voice whatever in the government. Private members are amenable to the class-leader -- the class-leader to the preacher -- the preacher to the presiding elder -- the presiding elder to the bishop. Is this equality? The people have no voice in electing or dismissing their preacher, but must take whoever is sent, and let him go at the expiration of three years. The preacher has no choice of his field of labor. He must go just where the bishop may please to send him. The church does not receive or expel either her minister or members. The circuit preacher has power to expel private members -- the quarterly conference to expel local preachers, deacons and elders -- the yearly conference to expel traveling

preachers -- the general conference to expel bishops. Is this equality? Read the following question and answer in the Methodist Discipline, in reference to the ordination of an elder, and then read the text.

"Will you reverently obey your chief ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourself to their godly judgments?"

"I will do so, the Lord being my helper."

Chief ministers! chief ministers! who are they? "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Surely, the language of Christ, and the language of the Discipline are very dissimilar. These churches, whose forms of government I have reviewed, compose the great majority of the professedly Christian world. It is evident, then, that such equality as the text teaches does not generally exist.

(continued on p.3)

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## EDITORIAL

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### Strange Words at the Empire State Regular Baptist Fellowship

The Chairman of the Council of 18 of the GARBC was a featured speaker at the Empire State Fellowship in October.

Speaking from Acts 20:29-30, he made the following remarks:

"Last month I wasn't invited to the Pennsylvania meeting. I wasn't invited but I felt, **All Baptists are welcome in Baptist meetings.** And I knew they were going to do some things which were a little different, changing their name and so on. And so I paid my own way, I did not go as the chairman of the Council of 18, I did not go from my church, I just went for \_\_\_\_\_ to observe. Not to say anything, not to make any speech, not to influence, just to kind of be there. The Council of 10 took a poll and asked me not to come. But they said, 'We cannot forbid you, but if you do come, we have a request, don't speak publicly or don't speak privately to the issue.' Oh, I wouldn't have thought of speaking publicly, unless invited. Privately - that's my business. One Council member wrote to me and said, 'I strongly protest your coming.' And he wrote me another letter and said 'I strongly protest your coming.' I went anyhow. When I got back I got this letter, he said, 'I saw you at the Pennsylvania meeting and I wanted to come over and talk to you but I didn't think I could because I so strongly protested your presence against the advice of some of us.' Hey, but I had a lot of others - the local church invited me and picked me up in a Cadillac at the airport! Hey, whatever you may say friends, that's not Christian love. Maybe it was none of my business, I think all that happens in God's work is the business of all of us. Especially in a Baptist meeting."

## OBSERVATIONS

1. Since there is no organic relationship between the national GARBC and the state fellowships, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ had no real reason to be at the meeting in Pennsylvania.

2. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ is Chairman of the Council of the national GARBC. He is respected by many men for his many years of faithful service. As Chairman of an oligarchy few men will ever have opportunity to serve in, his presence alone exerts considerable influence. Despite the fact that he declared at the Annual Conference of the GARBC in 1990 that he had served his last term on the Council, he remains as Chairman of the Council. The presence of such an officer in a meeting where some important decisions are being made is intimidating to some faint hearted pastors. He will notice who speaks and who votes for and against issues.

3. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ said, "I felt all Baptists are welcome in Baptist meetings.... I think all that happens in God's work is the business of all of us, especially in a Baptist meeting."

I am sure that State Secretaries in the Northern and Southern Baptist Conventions felt the same way when they visited the business sessions of local associations and local churches.

In spite of some misconceptions, an association does have a membership. The members are the messengers from the churches and their business is no one else's business.

The business of the local church is it's business and no one else's business. Yet it is a Baptist meeting. Are all Baptists welcome?

4. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ paid his way from Florida to Pennsylvania because the Association was discussing a name change that would remove the word "Regular" from the title. He said his private conversations about the issue while there were his business. I might ask, "Would that include conversations designed to persuade messengers to vote against the motion?" Some pastors who "Amen-ed" his comment would not tolerate such a practice in their own church business meeting.

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ has been considered a gentleman among his fellow Baptists for a long time. It is out of character for him to impose himself into a meeting of a state association when asked specifically not to attend. Most men would not have to be asked if they thought their presence would be unwelcome. But to insist on attending and then to boast of it in another state belies the claim that he was coming, not as Chairman of the Council of 18, but as Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. Is it lacking in Christian love to request an officer of the GARBC not to attend a state business meeting? Or is it lacking in Christian love to ignore that request and then to boast of it later?

## HOW MY MIND HAS CHANGED

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ said that we are going to have to have some tolerance in the area of Christian music - although a family member wrote letters on two occasions protesting the music at the Annual Conference of the GARBC. And he also made the statement at

the first meeting of the RBR "Music is amoral, it is the words that count --- and that's a lie!"

He also chided men for what he called third and fourth degree separation. Yet this same brother said in a message at the GARBC Annual conference in Niagara Falls in 1984, "I do not want to be a link in a chain, however long, that leads back to apostasy."

He also boasted that one of the latest orders from RBP came from some Roman Catholics. I wonder if that is to be interpreted that RBP material is acceptable to Roman Catholics. We certainly hope not! This editor thinks the remarks and actions of the speaker were at best inappropriate. And a word to the faint-hearted: as the speaker demonstrated, the words and actions of all Baptists are fair game!

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(Equality - continued from p.2)

**II. I proceed to show, in the second place, that Baptists seek to establish such equality.**

The principles of church government in the Baptist denomination are expressed in the text: "One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." There is no opportunity for the assumption of authority by a few, if it were desired. All meet on the broad, even platform of equality. The rich and the poor, the minister, deacons, and people, are all brethren. The pastor is no more, the poorest member is no less, than one of the brethren. Each church, in its collective capacity, transacts its own business, exercises its own discipline, and receives and excludes its own members, subject only to the authority of Christ, and governed by his Word. On all questions, every member of the church has an equal right to speak and to vote. There is no authority superior to the church, to reverse its decisions, or to call it to account. The pastor, while he has no superior authority, has equal rights with the rest of his brethren. If called to another field of labor, he is at liberty to go without asking leave of a bishop, presbytery, or council. He is perfectly free to act in accordance with his own views of duty and his own convictions of right.

In a Baptist church there is perfect equality. It could not be otherwise. They recognize the church as a voluntary organization, into which person enter by their own choice, and whose privileges and benefits all have an equal right to share. Christ has nowhere delegated his authority to a body of arrogant ministers, or prelatical bishops, or blasphemous popes; and Christians have no right to recognize and uphold the assumption of authority by them. It is not a matter of indifference. To support the assumptions of men, who have arrogated to themselves authority which belongs only to Christ, is to engage with them in rebellion against the one only Master; and where this is done knowingly, such cannot be held guiltless. In laboring, then, to advance Baptist sentiments, we aim to exalt Christ as the supreme and only Lawgiver and Ruler in Zion, in the place of presbyters, and bishops, and councils, and popes, who have usurped his throne.

But some suppose that every church has a right to make its own laws, and to alter these laws to suit times, and circumstances, and

places. Now, if the church was a merely human organization, this might be correct reasoning. But all churches claim to be of divine origin, and to have divine authority for their constitution and government. It is evident, therefore, that all cannot be right, for God cannot sanction contradictions. Further, if every church has a right to establish its own form of government, then the Romish church has an equal right with any Protestant church to invent and establish one, and no Protestant who takes this ground can consistently say a word against the Papal hierarchy. And if all are right, then right and wrong are no longer opposites. But all are not right. Christ has taught, in his Word, that the highest authority on earth is the church. Hence, in giving his apostles directions how to proceed in cases of offence, he designates the church as the supreme and final umpire. "Tell it to the church; and if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." Tell it to the church; not to the session, pr presbytery, or synod, or general assembly, or council, or conference, or bishop, or cardinal, or pope, but to the church; and if he neglect to hear the church -- what then? appeal? No; there is no higher authority to appeal to; for "one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." The creation of other tribunals is the result of the arrogance of men who love to "lord it over God's heritage;" and the support of them is owing mainly to the influence of just such men, and their willing dupes. Baptists are willing to be "all brethren;" the ministry have no desire to be exalted to a position of rivalry to the Master in his church.

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come again upon earth, and visit the places of worship in New York City and preach from this text. See him enter St. Patrick's cathedral. The Cardinal receives him very graciously, elated with the idea that the claim of Rome to be THE church is thus sanctioned by the Saviour, and he invites him to preach. He announces this text, and preaches as he did upon the plains of Judea: "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exercise lordship over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them; but so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be the servant of all. Be not ye called rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." The Cardinal grows uneasy; he reminds the Preacher of the Pope, the Cardinals, the Archbishops, the Bishops, the Father Confessors, the Priests; but the Divine Teacher asserts that these are distinctions which men have made, and reiterates the doctrine of the text--universal equality among his disciples. The Cardinal denounces the Saviour as a heretic, and he is thrust out. He then wends his way through our great thoroughfare to Trinity Church. Here he is cordially received, for the Episcopal also claims to be THE Church, and here he repeats the sermon. But he is reminded of the Archbishops, the Bishops, the Triennial Convention, the Priests, the Deacons. He pronounces these grades all contrary to his teaching. The Bishop intimates that he is probably a fanatical dissenter, and he is politely handed to the door. He visits in succession a Presbyterian and a Methodist congregation with the same sermon; in the former he is reminded of the Session, Presbytery, Synod, General Assembly; in the latter, he is cautioned about the "chief ministers;" and the Class-leader, Steward, Preacher, Presiding Elder, Bishop, with respective powers, are set before him; and for simply reiterating his own teachings, he is treated as a disturber of the peace, and put out of both places. See him now seek a Baptist pulpit. His sermon is just in accordance with their practice. There is nothing among them with which it comes in contact; no grades -- none to exercise lordship or authority over them: "for one is their Master, even Christ, and all they are brethren." A sincere "Amen" is the response from every heart, and the world's Redeemer, banished from the Romish and Protestant assemblies, finds a refuge and a home in every Baptist church!

Abridged for publishing. The entire text may be read in Baptists, Thorough Reformers. Rev. John Quincy Adams

In order more forcibly to exhibit the contrast between Baptists and the other most prominent sects, let us suppose Christ to

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