

BF&M 14: COOPERATION

Memory Verse: "For we are God's fellow-workers" 1 Cor. 3:9a.

Cooperation is one of those words that does not appear in the text of the Bible, but is encouraged, promoted, and exemplified throughout. Words like "fellowship," "partnership," "unity," etc., emphasize the importance of cooperation among the people of God. The idea of working together, or cooperation, extends beyond individuals to churches and even groups of churches. *The Baptist Faith & Message* reminds us that Christian unity is "spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people." Our voluntary cooperation as Baptists is grounded in the fact that we share a common s_____ and are called to common p_____ that can best be accomplished by working together. For Southern Baptists, cooperation means worldwide k_____ w_____ with others who share our faith, values, and worldview.

Below are some Scripture references of examples of cooperation. Match each reference with the description that best fits.

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| ___ 1. Nehemiah 3 | a. Providing for believers in need |
| ___ 2. Acts 2:44-47 | b. Using spiritual gifts to serve one another |
| ___ 3. 1 Peter 4:10-11 | c. Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem |
| ___ 4. Mark 2:3-4 | d. Bringing to Jesus a man who needed help |

Other New Testament examples of the cooperation of believers from different churches are the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and Paul's collection of an offering for the saints in Jerusalem, 1 Corinthians 16:1 & 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Congregationalism is a deeply established Baptist principle. We believe that the p_____ biblical understanding of the church is a local body of baptized believers that is responsible to God's authority. Yet we understand that just as Christians are not merely i_____ believers, disconnected from the body of Christ, individual Baptist churches are called to cooperate with other congregations for g_____ purposes. But these cooperative associations are v_____, not c_____.

The BF&M states that Christians are to "organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God." The first organized convention of Baptists in America grew out of f_____ missionary needs. The Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was organized in Ph_____ in 1812. This resulted in the founding of the Baptist General Convention, including all Baptists in the U.S..

Meeting every three years, it was called the Triennial Convention. Eventually, primarily over the issue of whether slaveholders could be appointed as missionaries, the members and churches of the Southern states withdrew. In 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was organized in Augusta, Georgia. It was formed for the purpose of promoting both home and foreign m_____. Today, the SBC conducts both North American and International missions work, supports six seminaries, and does other ministry through the financial support of individuals and churches who give voluntarily to the C_____. P_____ and other special missions offerings. This is in keeping with the BF&M statement that "Members in New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom."

Baptists believe in spiritual unity rather than organic union. For this reason, Southern Baptists have refused to become involved in various ecumenical movements (the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches) whose stated ultimate goals are organic union of all church groups. The National Council of Churches accepts only d_____ bodies as members. But the SBC has no authority to commit the churches, because every SBC church is a_____, with the congregation as the sole authority under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

However, Southern Baptist do cooperate with other churches and even other denominations in matters of mutual interest which do not c_____ their faith and practice as they understand the teachings of the New Testament. According to the BF&M, such cooperation "is desirable...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."