

Becoming What We Left

A man pastors a church which is part of the Conservative Baptist Association. He involves himself in this organization until one day, he realizes that he has had an inappropriate motivation: a desire to become the president of the group. He also becomes increasingly aware of things in the organization he believes are wrong. After prayer and consideration, he quits. He focuses his attention on another “group.” He invests his time, his money and his personal influence into this group. After a while, that group, too, goes bad. By now, he is an older man. He is tired of fighting. While he will grieve at the things that are happening in his group, he will not leave. He has friends, relatives, associates there. It is too hard to go.



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A man, 80 or 90 years ago, objects to what he views as excessive control and compromise in the Southern Baptist Convention. He preaches against it, opposes it, and eventually withdraws his church from this affiliation. Later, he starts his own organization. After a while, he becomes as controlling in his own organization as those he spoke against in the Southern Baptist Convention. A group of men object and leave. They start yet another fellowship, which after some years, begins to take a weakened stand on the Bible, on separation, and on scriptural church-building. The more conservative men in this group leave and start yet another organization.

A man grows up in the Southern Baptist Convention. As a matter of conviction, he leaves and becomes an Independent Baptist. He willingly describes himself as a Separatist. After time goes on, motivated, at least in part, by a sincere desire to do more for the cause of Christ, he decides to start his own fellowship, publish his own directory, and lead his own movement.

It seems to me we can trace the steps in the cycle of compromise as follows:

□ Affiliation. For some reason, the local church, which God instituted and ordained, is not enough. We want to be part of something larger, something “more important,” something that can “do more” for the cause of Christ. Therefore, we affiliate ourselves with some group which may encompass many local churches.

□ Aggravation. Some compromise occurs within the group. Some policy changes are made. A direction is taken which troubles us. At first, this is just a matter of prayer or quiet discussion with a few friends. Ultimately, the problems become more pronounced.

□ Altercation. Now we take a stand. Now we speak up in the meetings. Now we may find it necessary to write a letter to publicize our position in one manner or another. Sadly, most of these efforts fail, and we end up leaving the organization that had become so important to us.

□ Alienation. The meetings we once attended are no longer on our calendar. The position we once held no longer exists. Many of the friends with whom we fellowship have stayed with the original organization, and we find it difficult to enjoy the same relationship with them we once did. We feel isolated. Alone. (I find it interesting that the man referenced in my second example above who once criticized the Southern Baptist Convention in the strongest of terms, later criticized churches which would not join his organization as “spiritual Ishmaelites: all alone, out in the wilderness.”) Some of our brethren, who have taken the same stand we have taken, gather together and we start . . .

□ A new organization! We are now back to the stage of . . .

□ Affiliation. And the cycle repeats itself again and again and again.

Much of this occurs because man is a tribal creature. We like to belong; we like to be accepted; we like to feel secure. Some of it occurs because we get to a stage in our life and ministry where we would like to influence others. Sometimes that desire to influence lends itself to an inappropriate attempt to control. I always find it intriguing that those who rebelled against being under bondage find no objection to placing others in bondage under them.

My personal opinion is that much good has been done through fellowships and there are many of which I have a highly favorable opinion. I have preached at some of these meetings and appreciate the spirit of the people and all that they are trying to accomplish. However, any such involvement has inherent dangers as listed above. Especially as we get older and tired of fighting, it is easier for us to ignore compromises that would once have caused us to withdraw. If we choose to be part of fellowships beyond the local church, we must set clear markers, must draw bold lines, and must make strong commitments to depart when compromise occurs.

For me personally, I'm entirely content to be part of my family and my church. I enjoy fellowship with my brethren. I attend wonderful meetings, almost all of them sponsored by a local, independent, fundamental Baptist church. I support missionaries. I try to help my brethren in their projects. I want to have a cooperative spirit. I am not an isolationist, but I personally have found it wise neither to be a joiner. For me, the word "independent" is not a noun naming the organization I joined. It is an adjective describing my behavior. Of course, my main motivation in being independent is that I have no organizational structure between me and God. I must be independent from the control of men so that I may remain dependent on my Heavenly Father . . . for what it's worth.