

# Reflections on Associationalism in Baptist Life

Acts 15:6-35

Gary Farley

## Introduction

1,200 related to SBC life. Full Partners in the Great Commission Missions Enterprise. Each association is autonomous and is comprised of autonomous congregations.

Personally, worked with AMD/HMB from 1984 thru 1997. Leader for the Town and County work of the SBC, through the associations.

Since 1998 at Pickens Baptist Association. Associational Missionary. I believe in the importance of associations.

## I. Biblical Base

- A. Forum for honest, forthright discussion
- B. Found the Mind of Christ for missions through the process.
- C. Shared their findings with the churches, through writing and distributing a letter.
- D. Content was to affirm the missions enterprise.

## II. Baptist Experience with Associational Life

- A. Saw a need for inter-church fellowship and cooperation. Liberty/Cooperation.
- B. Found in Acts 15 a biblical base.
- C. The contemporary (17<sup>th</sup> Century) model of an association seemed to fit the biblical account of the Jerusalem conference.
- D. The modern missions movement arose in an association in the following century.
- E. Local missions, area missions were tied to associations during the periods of westward expansion and urban expansion in the United States. Destitute of a Gospel witness. Assn. Evangelist.

## III. West Alabama Experience

- A. About 1820 Baptist churches began to spring up in the area.
- B. These were “covenanted” community congregations. (Note the church covenants still found on the walls of area churches.)
- C. Early conflicts in the Baptist family
  1. Primitives/anti-board. Broke away.
  2. Free-wills. Broke away.
  3. Churches of Christ. Broke away.
- D. Annual meetings. Like a camp-meeting. Period of 1820 to 1870. Part-time missionary evangelist. Plants rural churches. Ties churches to the missions program of SBC
- E. Sunday School Conventions added. 1870 to 1900.
- F. Response to the coming of the railroads. Mission opportunity. Assn. adds executive committee. Becomes year around. Works to plant churches.
- G. Post-WWII. Hires associational missionary. Works on program development.

## IV. Future

- A. Catalyst for missions—volunteers.
- B. Promote and manage cooperative ministries in the area.
- C. Manage cooperative events.
- D. Provide pastoral/leadership training.
- E. Offer consultations to the churches.
- F. Spokesperson on moral issues.
- G. Strategist for the Baptist Movement in the area.
- H. Vision caster for missions/ministry/evangelism.